

# Joining hands to ensure a

By Jacky Achan

**O**n a Saturday afternoon on November 26, 2016 tensions that had been building over weeks

erupted into violence in Kasese town, which is home to the Rwenzururu Kingdom.

Police raided offices of the kingdom in response to attacks on police posts in the region allegedly conducted by the royal guards. Eight royal guards were killed in this raid and two others were arrested.

The following day, the police supported by the army (UPDF) raided the Rwenzururu palace after an ultimatum given to the royal guards to surrender expired.

The palace was attacked and police sources indicated that 87 royal guards had been killed during the raid on the palace and the number of police men killed during the period was put at 16. Ugandans and the world were left stunned by the turn of events in Kasese.

## Peace interventions

The National Youth Organisation for Development



Tumwine says the Rwenzururu kingdom has a long history of conflict

is currently leading a 36-month Peacebuilding and Inclusion project in the Rwenzori region.

They are working together with the Kasese District Union of Persons with Disabilities (KADUPEDE) and Kabarole

District Union of Persons with disabilities (KADIPU) to instil peace in the region, And the peace project is

## Other conflicts in the Rwenzori

Yasin Tumwine who heads the National Youth Organisation for Development (NAYODE), an organisation currently involved in peacebuilding, says the Rwenzururu kingdom in the Rwenzori region has a long history of conflict.

"It involves minority ethnic groups who include, among others, the Bamba, the Basangora, the Banyabindi and the Bakigwe, all struggling for recognition," he says.

Tumwine says when the Rwenzururu kingdom was restored, it was seen as a representation of the majority Bakonzo, rather than all ethnic groups in the region.

The other tribes sought to have their own Kingdoms, which the Bakonzo saw as a deliberate attempt to limit the influence of the Rwenzururu kingdom.

In 2014 when the Bamba kingdom was recognised, the Bakonzo youth staged attacks in various localities, triggering reprisal killings and counter operations by security forces.

Also, land conflicts are rife in the region. "The element of marginalisation and land matters has all created a volatile environment that can lead to conflict at any time," Tumwine says.

being funded by a European Union (EU) under the "European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Country Based Support Scheme (CBSS) – Uganda" grant to Action on Disability and Development (ADD) International and

National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU). Yasin Tumwine who heads NAYODE, says they are borrowing knowledge from the disabled persons in Uganda to attain peace in the region. "The disabled persons in

# conflict-free Rwenzori

**ON MAY 12, NAYODE WILL ORGANISE A REGIONAL PEACE CONFERENCE BRINGING TOGETHER ALL STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN BUILDING PEACE IN THE RWENZORI REGION**

the disabled persons in Uganda to attain peace in the region.

"The disabled persons in Uganda have managed to be accepted the way they are, minus being marginalised.

Today, no one is looking at their disability, but ability. We want to take from this example and build lasting peace in the Rwenzori region," he says.

After the army and the Police stormed the Rwenzururu kingdom palace, NAYODE embarked on a peace building project targeting all parties affected and those involved.

NAYODE, with its different partners journeyed to dissuade the Police from indiscriminately arresting all known royal guards.

They also accompanied the youth who were ordered to report to the Police, ensuring that they were released after statements were taken.

## **Gains made in building peace**

Edison Ngirabakunzi, the executive director of NUDIPU, says the peace project is already bringing results among the youth.

Ngirabakunzi adds that the peace building structures, including dialogue, will further be strengthened to ensure peace prevails for the long term in the Rwenzori region. "The more people avoid violence, the more we will be peaceful. We will not see people resort to fighting to resolve disputes, but rather dialogue, and children are crucial to this structure," he says.

## **Consolidating peace**

Tumwine says the Rwenzori region has the acknowledged challenge of civil conflict, political conflict, military conflict and resource-based conflict.

But he says their mandate now is in civil peace building, which focuses on marginalisation of minority ethnic groups and they have scored as much as 80% in resolving civil conflict in the Rwenzori region.

Tumwine says they are forming peace groups in communities, working with

ethnic minority groups, women groups, the disabled and several other stakeholders to champion peace in the region.

For Tumwine, facilitating community-based meetings and pushing for dialogue is the only practical means of bringing peace to the Rwenzori region.

On May 12, NAYODE is to organise a regional peace conference bringing together all stakeholders involved in building peace in the Rwenzori region.

Tumwine says together, they will bring different experiences and capacities to achieve absolute success in peace building.

Adding that the outcome of the conference will give NAYODE and all stakeholders what to base on in their future plans on building peace in the Rwenzori region.

Joseph Walugembe, ADD's Uganda country director, says they aim at having annual peace conferences.

"It will bring together key actors in peace and conflict in the region to recommit to promoting the value of peaceful co-existence," he says.

## **Achieving lasting peace**

Walugembe says they are using their experience in dealing with discrimination among disabled persons, and applying the same principles to promote peace in the Rwenzori.

"All our messages to the different parties in the Rwenzori conflict, including the ethnic groups, cultural leaders, political and military people is that they can resolve conflict minus using violence," he says.

"We are not leaving anyone behind," he adds.

Walugembe says they have brought on board a number of youth in their peace campaign.

"The youth have renounced violence and have joined our peace clubs and are spreading the gospel of peace. Also, the conflicting communities are now more willing to peacefully co-exist and seek services of peace mediators



**Bwamba cultural entertainers during a coronation of the Bwamba king. The Bwamba are part of the ethnic groups in the Rwenzori region**



**Religious leaders in Kasese praying with the Rwenzururu king, Charles Wesley Mumbere, for peace. According to NAYODE, an organisation currently involved in peace-building in the region, facilitating community-based meetings and pushing for dialogue is the only practical way of bringing peace to the Rwenzori**

**Key persons targeted to promote peace in the Rwenzori**

According to Walugembe, the peace building project starts with children over three years in schools. He explains that the values imparted during childhood is what is carried into adulthood.

"We have peace clubs in schools and communities and we intend to add peace programmes in the co-curricular activities of schools so it can be sustainable," he explains.

Walugembe says through the peace building project, they are also empowering district service commissioners to engage the youth into understanding the nature of the operations and structures.

"It's important for the youth to understand the element of job distribution in the district minus feeling cheated and working together to create jobs so that they don't feel marginalised into violence," he says.

Walugembe says they are also to appeal to security people to be more community-oriented in dealing with issues of security.

He says rights need to be respected for a peaceful co-existence and that peace should prevail in the long term in the Rwenzori region.

and dialogue whenever there is a misunderstanding," he explains. Walugembe says there is also recognition for

the peace mediators from the security organs who have taken to calling upon them to participate in conflict

resolution.

He adds that even the king of the Rwenzururu, Wesley Mumbere, has in the past

picked the peace messages, which got shared with his subjects to promote peaceful existence.