

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Congressman Jeff Fortenberry and Congressman Jim McGovern today commented on the announcement from the White House this morning concerning the Department of Defense's new effort to combat the Lord's Resistance Army in central Africa.

"Through over 20 years of civil war, the brutal insurgency has created a humanitarian crisis that has displaced over 1.5 million people in one of the world's most difficult ungoverned spaces," said Fortenberry. "Tens of thousands of children have been abducted, and many forced into child soldiering or sex slavery. The steps being taken by the Department of Defense today may help save innocent lives and begin to bring the LRA to justice for the immense human tragedy that has fallen across central Africa at its hands."

"I'm very pleased with today's announcement," said McGovern. "For far too long, innocents have suffered at the hands of the LRA. I also continue to call on the Administration to ensure the non-military assistance called for under the Comprehensive Strategy is provided for civilian protection; assistance for victims and communities of LRA-violence, especially children and women; and recovery and reconstruction aid."

Fortenberry and Congressman Jim McGovern led a push to end the LRA's campaign of violence during debate on the FY12 National Defense Authorization Act. They also led a bipartisan effort pressing appropriators for adequate resources to implement the Comprehensive Strategy to help end the atrocities committed by the LRA, protect innocent civilians, and stabilize a region of Africa that is critical to U.S. national security interests. Fortenberry also authored and passed a successful amendment to the FY12 State Department Authorization Act in support of the Comprehensive Strategy, making it official policy of the United States government to urge immediate implementation to reduce the need for expensive emergency humanitarian aid in this volatile region. McGovern was the lead sponsor in the House of H.R. 2478/S.1067, the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, mandating the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy, which passed Congress and was signed into law last year.

"I also expect that the Department of Defense will be vigilant in urging the demobilization of child soldiers among military ranks in central Africa," said Fortenberry. "Included among the countries that have been affected by the LRA's campaign of violence are major child soldiers violators South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. All United States efforts to restore effort to this conflict-plagued region must fully reflect the policy of the United States government: that children belong on playgrounds, not battlegrounds."

Fortenberry is the Vice-Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, and Human Rights. McGovern is the Democratic Co-Chair of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and a member of the House Rules Committee.

###