

## Grant Park rally aims to aid Ugandan kids

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By Lolly Bowean, Tribune staff reporter. Tribune staff reporter David Wischnowsky contributed to this report

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Jacob Acaye once walked for miles just to sleep outdoors in a gated cage. Surrounded by other northern Ugandan children, he stayed in a safehouse to avoid being captured by a violent rebel army.

On Saturday night, Acaye, 17, was outdoors again, this time surrounded by Chicagoans in Grant Park, in hopes of drawing attention to a cause most people are unaware of.

"I'm here to represent the children of Uganda," Acaye said Saturday afternoon. "This will help us. We need the help of the United States."

By 8:30 p.m., about 2,000 people had gathered at Grant Park under a light drizzle for a peaceful demonstration. They wanted to urge the U.S. to intervene in Uganda, where soldiers with the Lord's Resistance Army have been accused of abducting, enslaving and brainwashing about 20,000 children.

The Chicago demonstration was one of 130 similar events scheduled around the nation.

The effort was organized by Invisible Children Inc., a group founded by three filmmakers who traveled to Africa and learned about the Ugandan children's fate. Acaye was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in 2002 and forced to become a fighter. He escaped, but not before he and other children were forced to brutalize other people and fight each other.

Invisible Children Inc. helped him attend a boarding school and paid for him to travel to the U.S. to attend Saturday night's event in Chicago.

The demonstration allowed people to experience part of what children of Uganda go through by sleeping outside, despite the rain and cold, said Jason Russell, one of the organization's founders. The event also can make public officials aware of the number of people who want the U.S. to bring peace to the war-stricken region, he said.

"This is an easy conflict to end," he said. "It could end in a week or a month if we take action. During the Rwandan crisis, people said they didn't know. During the

Holocaust, we said we didn't know. Now we know, and we have to do something."

The Lord's Resistance Army, a group of rebels trying to overthrow the government in Uganda, also is accused of forcing children to engage in murders, rapes and kidnappings.

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