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Uganda: Information on "Operation Wembley" launched in June 2002, which became the "Violent Crime Crack Unit" (VCCU) in 2003 (June 2002-March 2004)

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Launched in June 2002 (HRW 2003; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, sect.1c; AI 14 Oct. 2003), the codenamed Operation Wembley, a "joint security team formed [of forces] from the intelligence services, police and the army" (ibid. 2003), was aimed at fighting violent crimes in the country (ibid.; HRW 2003; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004).

However, various sources stated that its members were implicated in extrajudicial killings and had committed abuses against civilians (AI 14 Oct. 2003; *New Vision* 30 May 2003; HRW 2003; *Monitor* 25 Feb. 2003). Citing Veronica Eragu Bichetero, the Ugandan Human Rights Commissioner, a 25 February 2003 *Monitor* article noted that during Operation Wembley, security forces have committed atrocities such "using pliers to pluck the finger nails of suspects during interrogations and squashing the private parts of suspects to extract confessions." She also indicated that security forces, including those from the Operation Wembley "had plunged the country into anarchy through torture of suspects" (*New Vision* 25 Feb. 2003).

According to Amnesty International's annual report for 2003, "those arrested under 'Operation Wembley' were held without charge [...]. Of approximately 450 suspects arrested by November, around 200 were reportedly to face trials before military courts made up of senior army officers."

While Operation Wembley was disbanded and replaced by the Violent Crime Crack Unit (VCCU) in 2003 (AI 14 Oct. 2003; *Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, 1.c; *The Monitor* 29 Feb. 2004; ibid. 26 July 2003), various reports stated that the latter was also involved in human rights abuses against civilians (*Country Reports 2003* 25 Feb. 2004, sect 1. a and c; AVSI 2003; AI 14 Oct. 2004).

A 14 October 2003 Amnesty International report stated that "[i]ncommunicado detention, extraction of information and confession through torture and degrading treatment appear to be a common feature of the practices, which continue to be carried out by VCCU agents."

The Monitor, a Kampala-based newspaper, reported the following:

In January [2003], Operation Wembley, under which security forces could arrest and try by court martial civilians found in possession of military property, was phased out and replaced by the VCCU, which also used military courts to try suspects. The VCCU arrested and detained at least 500 suspects on various counts including terrorism, aggravated robbery, murder, illegal possession of firearms and desertion (29 Feb. 2004).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum.

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