

SUMMARY

# CHILD SOLDIERS



## Global Report 2008



COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS



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USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

# Child Soldiers Global Report 2008

## SUMMARY

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# Countries/situations where children were recruited

## **Africa**

Burundi  
Central African Republic  
Chad  
Cote d'Ivoire

Democratic Republic of the Congo  
Somalia  
Sudan  
Uganda

## **Americas and the Caribbean**

Colombia



# or used in hostilities – April 2004 to October 2007

## Asia Pacific

Afghanistan  
India  
Indonesia  
Myanmar (Burma)  
Thailand

Nepal  
Philippines  
Sri Lanka

## Middle East

Iraq  
Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territory



# Child soldiers: progress, but too little

Four years is a long time in a child's life. Much can happen that will touch the rest of their lives for good or for ill. Some children may live their lives in situations of peace and security. For countless others war continues to be all too real. Over this aspect of the adult world they have little say and no control.

Four years is sufficient for substantial developments in the life of a global movement. The last Global Report was published by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition) in November 2004; since then the movement to end the use of child soldiers has seen continued progress towards a universal consensus against their use in hostilities, witnessed by the fact that over three-quarters of states have now signed, ratified or acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

On the ground, the consensus would appear to be reflected most clearly by a decrease in the number of conflicts in which children are directly involved – from 27 in 2004 to 17 by the end of 2007. The Coalition's research for this Global Report shows, however, that that this downward trend is more the result of conflicts ending than the impact of initiatives to end child soldier recruitment and use. Indeed, where armed conflict does exist, child soldiers will almost certainly be involved. The majority of these children are in non-state armed groups, but the record of some governments is also little improved.

The figures for conflict do not reveal the whole picture. The military recruitment of children (under-18s) and their use in hostilities is a much larger phenomenon that still takes place

in one form or another in at least 86 countries and territories worldwide. This includes unlawful recruitment by armed groups, forcible recruitment by government forces, recruitment or use of children by militias or other groups associated with armed forces, their use as spies, as well as legal recruitment into peacetime armies.

The findings make it clear that, despite the high level of international attention on the issue, the impact of that attention is yet to be felt by many children who are, or are at risk of becoming, child soldiers. They have reinforced the fact that a complex range of co-ordinated responses by multiple actors are required to achieve the goal of preventing children's involvement in armed conflict, obtaining their release and supporting successful reintegration. This will involve a more explicit recognition of child soldiers on the agendas of those involved in a whole range of initiatives, from conflict prevention, peacemaking and mediation through to peace-building and longer-term development.

Ultimately, if, over the next four years, the international community is to make good its promise to protect children from military exploitation, the level of political will, the amount of human and financial resources, the adherence to established best practice and the quantity as well as the quality of collaborative effort and imaginative endeavour must all be multiplied.

## *International efforts continue*

The international framework to protect children from involvement in armed forces and groups has been reinforced and efforts have focused increasingly on field-level implementation.

The first important steps towards establishing individual criminal responsibility for those who recruit and use children in hostilities have been taken. War crimes charges relating to the conscription, enlistment and active

participation in hostilities of children under 15 years old have been issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against members of armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. A landmark in international justice was forged by the conviction in 2007 by the Special Court for Sierra Leone of four people on charges that included the recruitment and use of children during the civil war. The pursuit of justice has also been furthered by the work of truth commissions in Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and recently Liberia, all of which have addressed the issue of child soldiers.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol) – the most specific prohibition of child soldiers under international law – has now been ratified by 120 states, up from 77 in mid-2004. The United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child began to examine state party reports on the Optional Protocol implementation in January 2005. Their concluding observations are generating an increased momentum towards developing modalities for protecting children from military recruitment and use, as well as providing an insight into further measures that many governments must take if they are to achieve this goal.

Building on previous actions, the UN Security Council adopted resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) calling for the establishment of a monitoring and reporting mechanism on children and armed conflict. Now set up in around a dozen countries, the mechanism is tasked with documenting six categories of grave abuse against children, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, in the situations of armed conflict listed in the annexes of the UN Secretary-General's regular reports on the topic. A Security Council working group on children and armed conflict was set up in 2005 to review reports submitted under the mechanism and to monitor progress in the development and implementation of time-bound action plans by

warring parties to end their recruitment and use of child soldiers. The working group has issued conclusions based on the reports, transmitted letters and appeals to parties engaged in violations, and taken a range of other actions on situations where abuses against children have been committed.

The first actions by the Security Council to apply targeted measures against individuals specifically for recruiting and using children were taken in 2006, when a travel ban was imposed on an armed group leader in Côte d'Ivoire. A Security Council resolution the same year sought to subject to travel bans and asset freezing leaders in the DRC who recruited or used child soldiers.

Regional bodies have also continued to focus attention on this issue. The European Union's (EU) 2003 Guidelines on children and armed conflict were given practical direction by an implementation strategy issued in 2006. The same year a checklist on integration and protection of children was adopted to ensure that child rights and protection concerns are systematically addressed in European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) operations and mission planning. The African Union (AU) renewed its calls for its member states to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the end of 2008 and to enact relevant implementing legislation by 2010. The Charter requires state parties inter alia to refrain from recruiting children and to ensure that they do not take direct part in hostilities.

On the ground, tens of thousands of child soldiers have been released from armies and armed groups since 2004 as long-running conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa have ended. A major initiative to gather and compile accumulated experience from the demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers around the world culminated in the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (Paris Principles). Endorsed by 66 governments at ministerial meetings in February and October

in 2007, including many from conflict-affected countries, the Paris Principles offer guidance on protecting children from recruitment and on providing effective assistance to those already involved with armed groups or forces.

The large-scale recruitment and deployment of children by government forces in countries such as Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Liberia ceased with the end of conflicts. More than half of countries worldwide have set the minimum age at which an individual can enter the military, including for training, at 18.

In response to international pressure and local initiatives, several armed groups have committed themselves to ending the recruitment and use of children. Groups in Côte d'Ivoire and Sri Lanka are working with the UN to develop and implement time-bound action plans to release children and prevent their recruitment. Ethnic armed groups in Myanmar have agreed to do likewise.

### ***Real protection requires redoubling of effort***

While the general direction is positive, the pace of progress is slow and its impact is not yet felt by the tens of thousands of children in the ranks of fighting forces. The international framework offers little real protection for countless others who are at risk of recruitment and use in conflict.

The Coalition has documented information on 21 countries or territories where children were deployed to areas of conflict between April 2004 and October 2007. Within this period conflicts ended in two of the 21 – Indonesia and Nepal – and so too did child soldier use there. Although this is fewer than the preceding four years, the Coalition's research reveals a number of disturbing findings that make it clear that the efforts to date have been insufficient.

The first of these findings is perhaps the most stark. It is this: when armed conflict breaks

out, reignites or intensifies, children will almost inevitably become involved as soldiers. The Central African Republic, Chad, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan (Darfur) are all cases in point.

Next, efforts to demobilize children during conflict have met with only limited success. Peace remains the main hope for securing the release of child soldiers from armed forces and groups, a fact that further reinforces the importance of child protection being integral to peace negotiations, as well as the need for explicit provisions relating to child soldiers in ceasefire and peace agreements.

The impact of efforts to end child soldier recruitment and use by armed groups has been similarly limited. Armed groups in at least 24 countries located in every region of the world were known to have recruited under-18s and many have used them in hostilities. Many have proved resistant to pressure and persuasion. Their widely diverse characters, aims and methods, and the varied environments in which they operate militate against generic solutions. Effective strategies must be multifaceted and context-specific. Above all, they must address root causes. Poor governance and its effects, including impoverishment, inequality, discrimination and human rights abuses, are all known to contribute to the risk that children will be recruited by armed groups. While such conditions persist, children will remain vulnerable to involvement in armed forces and groups.

The number of governments that deployed children in combat or other frontline duties in their armed forces has not significantly decreased since 2004. Children have been used in armed conflict by government forces in nine situations compared with 10 in the previous four-year period. The most notable offender remains Myanmar, whose armed forces, engaged in long-running counter-insurgency operations against a range of ethnic armed groups, are believed to contain thousands of children. Children were also

reported to have been used in hostilities in Chad, the DRC, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. Additionally, Palestinian children were used on several occasions by defence forces in Israel as human shields. There were reports of child soldier use by Yemeni armed forces in fighting in 2007. A few under-18s in the UK armed forces were sent to Iraq.

The flouting of international standards by governments extends beyond official armed forces. Children in at least 14 countries have been recruited into auxiliary forces linked to national armies; into local-level civilian defence groups established to support counter-insurgency operations; or into militias and armed groups acting as proxies for government forces. In at least eight countries children were used as spies and for other intelligence-gathering purposes, placing them at risk of reprisals and ignoring government responsibilities to provide protection and reintegration assistance.

Despite growing knowledge of best practices for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers, lessons learned from past efforts have continued to be overlooked in the implementation of official programs. In many DDR processes the needs of child soldiers were not prioritized and in some were entirely overlooked. Reintegration programs were frequently not tailored to their specific needs and have suffered from chronic under-funding.

The repetition of mistakes has been acute in relation to girls. The special needs and vulnerabilities of girls affected by armed conflict have long been recognized, yet they are not well served by DDR processes. The vast majority of girls associated with fighting forces do not participate in official DDR programs and are not catered for in post-demobilization support. Specialized medical care for physical injury resulting from rape or sexually transmitted diseases is rarely available. Girl mothers and their children, often born of rape, are known to be particularly vulnerable, but

continue to suffer stigmatization and rejection by their families and communities.

Universal responsibilities under the Optional Protocol to protect children against recruitment and to promote the recovery and reintegration of former child soldiers have yet to be fully realized. When former child soldiers flee their country of origin, asylum processes and special measures facilitating their recognition as refugees are frequently lacking in destination countries, as is the provision of adequate services for their recovery and social reintegration. The legal framework to criminalize the recruitment and use of child soldiers and to establish extraterritorial jurisdiction over such crimes is also far from complete.

Finally, many state parties have undermined the spirit, if not the letter, of the Optional Protocol by continuing to target under-18s for military recruitment. While a number of states have raised the age of voluntary military recruitment within the past four years, at least 63 countries permitted the voluntary recruitment of children by their armed forces; 26 were known to have under-18s in the ranks. Others introduced children, often at a very young age, to military culture through military training in schools, cadet corps and various other youth initiatives.

Placing children's rights ahead of military needs requires far-reaching shifts in values and attitudes. Until it is accepted that childhood extends to 18, and that the spirit of the Protocol expects more of states than just amending the age of conscription, children will continue to be at risk of becoming soldiers, especially in times of crisis.

# Benchmarks for change

In four years' time the Optional Protocol will have been in force for a decade. The next four years cannot be allowed to go by without more progress to show. The ultimate judges of that progress will be children whose lives are blighted by their involvement in conflict and for whom international attention is of little comfort unless it changes their individual circumstances for the better. The damage resulting from the experience of being a child soldier may never be fully repaired. However, much can be done to lessen it. A great deal can also be done to prevent other children from ever suffering the same experience.

The task is most urgent in situations of armed conflict, but if the recruitment and use of child soldiers is to be definitively ended there must be global recognition that armed forces are no place for a child. On this basis, the Coalition is opposed to the military recruitment or use of any girl or boy under the age of 18. The benchmarks against which the progress over the next four years towards this goal will be judged include:

- A complete end to the use of children in hostilities in any capacity by government armed forces and by any forces linked to or supported by governments including auxiliaries, militias and civilian defence organizations.
- A significant increase in the numbers of non-state armed groups that have developed action plans to prevent the recruitment of under-18s and the release of children within their ranks; these armed groups are being supported and monitored in their implementation of such plans.
- The inclusion in all ceasefire and peace agreements of provisions for the immediate disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers.
- The inclusion of provisions for children in the design of official DDR programs and the consistent application of the Paris Principles in the implementation of all DDR initiatives, taking account of context-specific needs and realities. The inclusion as a matter of course of specialized culturally appropriate programs for girls, and the building into donor planning of long-term financial support for reintegration.
- The establishment by governments in countries with child soldiers (but no peacekeeping operation) of programs to identify and release such children and support their reintegration.
- The development of multi-faceted, multi-agency strategies to prevent child recruitment and use by armed groups, involving legal, institutional, social, economic and cultural measures in all high-risk situations including countries affected by conflict and those where armed groups operate or where conflict is possible.
- The explicit criminalization in domestic law of underage recruitment (i.e. conscription and enlistment) and use of any persons under the age of 18 to participate in hostilities and the establishment of universal jurisdiction for such crimes.
- Progress towards the systematic investigation and prosecution by national and international courts of individuals suspected of recruiting and using children in armed forces and groups. Where relevant this crime would also be addressed by other transitional justice processes, including truth commissions, reparations and vetting.
- The establishment of effective measures for refugee, asylum-seeking and migrant children in destination countries to protect those who may

have been recruited or used in hostilities. This includes ensuring their early identification and providing them with culturally and child-sensitive assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration.

- A significant increase in the number of countries that have abandoned domestic provisions that allow children to be legally recruited into the armed forces at the age of 16 or 17 and have adopted a “straight-18” standard for all forms of military recruitment.

# Facts & figures on child soldiers

## *Who are child soldiers?*

While there is no precise definition, the Coalition considers a child soldier any person below the age of 18 who is a member of or attached to government armed forces or any other regular or irregular armed force or armed political group, whether or not an armed conflict exists. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including: participation in combat; laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labour. Child soldiers may also be subjected to sexual slavery or other forms of sexual abuse.

A similar definition is provided in the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups. It states “A child associated with an armed force or armed group” refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.

## *Where child soldiers were involved in armed conflicts*

Children were actively involved in armed conflict in government forces or non-state armed groups in 19 countries or territories between April 2004 and October 2007. These were: **Afghanistan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Myanmar,**

**Nepal, Philippines, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand and Uganda.**

Peace agreements brought an end to internal conflicts in Aceh/Indonesia in 2005 and in Nepal in 2006. As a result the use of children in hostilities ended in both situations, although child soldiers with the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) had not been formally discharged.

## *Government armed forces which used children in armed conflicts*

The number of governments that used children in armed conflict only marginally declined – down from 10 in the period 2001-2004 to nine in 2004-2007.

In **Myanmar** boys below the age of 18 continued to be forcibly recruited into the army in large numbers and were used in active combat as well as other roles. Children also took direct part in hostilities in government armed forces in **Chad, the DRC, Somalia, Sudan/Southern Sudan and Uganda**. In addition, there were reports that the **Yemeni** armed forces used children in fighting against a militia in early 2007. The **Israeli** defence forces used Palestinian children as human shields on several occasions. A number of under-18s were deployed to Iraq by the **British** armed forces between 2003 and 2005, although most were removed from the theatre of war within a week of their arrival.

At least 14 governments also recruited, and in some cases used in hostilities, children in auxiliary forces, civilian defence groups or in illegal militias and armed groups acting as proxies for official armed forces. These included **Chad, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, the DRC, India, Iran, Libya, Myanmar, Peru, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe**. In **Burundi, Colombia, the DRC, India, Indonesia, Israel, Nepal and Uganda** children – often captured, surrendered or escaped from armed groups - were also used as spies, informants or messengers.

### *The recruitment and use of children by non-state armed groups*

The vast majority of child soldiers are in the ranks of non-state armed groups. Dozens of armed groups in at least 24 countries have recruited under-18s and many have used them in hostilities.

Armed groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in **Colombia**, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in **Sri Lanka**, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in **Uganda** are well known for having recruited and used children over many years. Others receive less international attention. In southern **Thailand** the separatist group National Revolution Front-Coordinate (BRN-C) recruits under-18s and uses them in various roles including propaganda and in support of military operations. In **India**, child recruitment by Maoist groups is reported to have increased since 2005 and there were persistent reports of child soldier use by groups in Jammu and Kashmir and northeastern states. In the **Philippines** and **Myanmar** children are associated with armed groups involved in protracted low-level conflicts with state forces.

In countries such as **Central African Republic** and **Chad** there are numerous irregular groups which are characterized by unclear, shifting alliances and activities that are often more criminal than political. In situations such as **Kenya** and **Nigeria** criminal groups involving children have been used for political purposes. In **Afghanistan**, **Iraq**, **the Occupied Palestinian Territory** and **Pakistan**, children were used by armed groups in suicide attacks.

### *The number of child soldiers globally*

Although it is impossible to accurately calculate the number of children involved in armed forces and groups, it is clear that there are many tens of thousands of child soldiers. Child soldiers exist in all regions of the world and, almost inevitably, wherever there is armed conflict.

It is likely that the number of child soldiers is fewer than in 2004 when the Coalition published its last Child Soldiers Global Report. Since then, tens of thousands of child soldiers have been released from fighting forces following peace agreements and demobilization programs in **Afghanistan**, **Burundi**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, **Liberia**, **Southern Sudan** and elsewhere. However, in the meantime, conflicts in countries such as **Central African Republic**, **Chad**, **Iraq**, **Somalia** and **Sudan** (Darfur) have broken out, reignited or intensified and child recruitment there increased.

### *The challenge of releasing and reintegrating child soldiers*

Tens of thousands of children have left armed forces and groups since 2004 as long-running conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa drew to a close. Although many thousands were demobilized through official disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs, many more child soldiers self-demobilized.

Lessons learned about the priorities and needs of children during official DDR processes were often ignored by planners and implementers. Fear of stigmatization and other obstacles prevented tens of thousands of children from registering for DDR programs. The long-term financial and political support needed to successfully reintegrate former child soldiers was frequently lacking and community programs – known to provide the best chance for recovery of war affected children including child soldiers – have not been well supported. Inadequate provision for long-term reintegration of former child soldiers was reported from **Afghanistan**, **Burundi**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **the DRC**, **Guinea**, **Liberia** and **Southern Sudan**.

In some cases official DDR programs made no provision for children or otherwise discourage their participation. In **Indonesia** only adults associated with the Free Aceh Movement

(GAM) benefited from DDR packages that followed the 2005 peace agreement. In the **Central African Republic**, out of the 7,500 combatants that went through the official DDR program following armed conflict in 2002-03, only 26 were children. In **Colombia**, restrictive criteria for accessing the government-run DDR program effectively excluded many child soldiers. In other situations, such as **India**, **Myanmar** and **Thailand**, no arrangements existed to facilitate the release of children from armed groups or to assist their reintegration.

### *The fate of girl soldiers*

Girls continued to be involved in fighting forces in combat and non-combat roles in countries including **Central African Republic**, **Chad**, **Nepal**, **Philippines** and **Sri Lanka**. Armed groups in **Colombia**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **the DRC** and **Uganda** were among those known to have subjected girl soldiers to rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Girls associated with armed forces or groups have been widely excluded from DDR programs. Figures from national DDR programs reflect extraordinarily low figures for girls' participation. In **Liberia**, 3,000 girls were officially demobilized through the formal DDR process that ended in November 2004. Around another 8,000 did not take part. In the **DRC**, just 3,000 or just 15 per cent of the total number of girls estimated to have been involved in the conflict were officially demobilized by the end of 2006 when the national DDR program drew to a close.

### *Justice initiatives*

The International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants against members of the LRA in **Uganda** in 2005 and subsequently against three members of Ituri-based armed groups in the **DRC**. The warrants included charges relating to the enlistment, conscription and direct use in hostilities of children under the

age of 15.<sup>1</sup> The first ever ICC trial, that of former Congolese armed group leader Thomas Lubanga Dyilo who is charged with child recruitment and use, is due to begin in June. In **Sierra Leone**, the guilty verdicts in 2007 by the Special Court for Sierra Leone against three members of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and one member of the government-backed Civilian Defence Forces (CDF) represented the first ever convictions by an international court on charges relating to the recruitment and use of children.

With the exception of two cases in the DRC, no one is known to have been prosecuted by national-level courts for recruiting and using children.

Truth commissions in **Sierra Leone**, **Timor-Leste** and **Liberia** have addressed the issue of child soldiers and former child soldiers have participated in their proceedings.

### *Child soldiers in detention*

In a number of countries children suspected of involvement in armed groups have been arbitrarily detained and some were reported to have been subjected to ill-treatment or torture. In **Burundi**, scores of children, some as young as nine years old have been detained for alleged links to the National Liberation Forces (FNL) for prolonged periods and some were severely beaten. In **India**, there was evidence that in areas of armed conflict children were detained, often in violation of national legislation designed to protect children. In **Israel**, hundreds of Palestinian children have been held under military provisions: incidents of ill-treatment and torture were reportedly common. In **Iraq** there were reports of abuse in facilities run by the Multi-National Force-Iraq where hundreds of children accused of security offences were detained. In the **Philippines**, detailed policies on the treatment of children captured, surrendered or escaped

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<sup>1</sup> An arrest warrant containing charges of recruiting and using children against a fourth member of an Ituri-based armed group was unsealed by the ICC in April 2008.

from armed groups have been ignored by the military and children held beyond officially sanctioned time-limits and in some cases ill-treated. In the **USA**, a detainee facing trial before a military commission, who was captured in Afghanistan in 2002 when he was 15-years old, alleged that he was ill-treated in US custody both in Afghanistan and in the US Naval Base in Guantánamo Bay.

In the **DRC** and **Myanmar** child soldiers have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment for desertion from the armed forces. In the DRC several children convicted of military offences remained in prison under sentence of death.

### *The trend towards a “straight-18” standard for military recruitment*

Of the 120 states that have ratified the Optional Protocol, almost two thirds have committed themselves to setting a minimum voluntary recruitment age at 18 or higher. In the past four years, the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces has been raised to 18 in **Chile, Italy, Jordan, the Maldives, Sierra Leone, Slovenia** and **South Korea**.

Sixty-three countries permitted the voluntary recruitment of under-18s by their armed forces. In **Australia, New Zealand** and the **United Kingdom** calls to raise the minimum recruitment age to 18 have been resisted on the grounds of manpower requirements. In the **USA**, following a dramatic number of under-18s joining the military, and general recruitment bonuses, increased enlistment bonuses were introduced and educational standards for recruits lowered.

Elsewhere, safeguards to ensure that minimum recruitment ages were respected were undermined by inadequate measures to determine the age of recruits. In countries such as **Bangladesh, Botswana, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Guinea, India, Kenya** and **Zambia**, the risk of inadvertent underage recruitment was created by low birth registration levels. In **Paraguay**, lack of birth registration facilitated

forced conscription of children as young as twelve years old. In countries such as **Afghanistan** and **Yemen**, inadequate verification procedures to determine the age of new recruits meant that under-age soldiers were likely to be serving in security forces.

# Voices of child soldiers

## *Recruitment Practices*

“They filled the forms and asked my age, and when I said 16, I was slapped and he said, ‘You are 18. Answer 18’ He asked me again and I said, ‘But that’s my true age’. The sergeant asked, ‘Then why did you enlist in the army?’ I said, ‘Against my will. I was captured.’ He said, ‘Okay, keep your mouth shut then,’ and he filled in the form. I just wanted to go back home and I told them, but they refused. I said, ‘Then please just let me make one phone call,’ but they refused that too.”

–Maung Zaw Oo, describing the second time he was forced into the Tatmadaw Kyi (army) in 2005 (Myanmar/Burma).<sup>2</sup>

“Child soldiers are ideal because they don’t complain, they don’t expect to be paid, and if you tell them to kill, they kill.”

–Senior officer in the Chadian National Army (ANT).<sup>3</sup>

“When the armed groups have got recruited children and youth, they then would *supah* or take an oath. After that, they cannot withdraw. Otherwise, other members would kill them called ‘blood halal’ or killing without guilt, because this is an act of betrayal to religion by ‘*munafi*’.”

–A religious leader from Pattani interviewed by the Coalition in 2007 describing the recruitment of children and youth by armed separatist groups (Southern Thailand).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Sold to be Soldiers: The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Burma*, October 2007.

<sup>3</sup> HRW, *Early to War: Child Soldiers in the Chad Conflict*, July 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *Munafiqun* means a traitor.

“We saw our children on the top floor of [Karuna’s political party] office. We were three mothers of children taken from here. The children signalled to us that we should go or they would get hit.”

–Mother of a child abducted by the Karuna Group, October 2006 (Sri Lanka).<sup>5</sup>

“Even if there are orders [to demobilize children], battalion commanders will keep the children but hide them in the battalion compound or battalion farms, but they’ll keep them because they don’t have enough soldiers. When I was in the army we always felt we had too many officers and not enough soldiers.”

–Major Myint Soe, former battalion commander in the Tatmadaw Kyi (Myanmar/Burma).<sup>6</sup>

## *Training and Treatment*

“During training, there were three trainers and six recruited children. They were trained privately in other villages. I acted as a basic trainer, teaching how to scatter spikes and plant bombs. Later, when individuals actually had to plant bombs, one person would dig a hole and then others would plant the bombs. My duty was to train recruited children. They were selected before I trained. I did not know other details.”

–A former member of the armed separatist group, National Revolution Front-Coordinate (BRN-C) (Southern Thailand).<sup>7</sup>

“In the mornings we had to do long and short runs with backpacks. We had to run five miles a week, and do long marches of about 30 miles. I was 11, so I couldn’t keep up but had to do my best, otherwise they whipped me

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<sup>5</sup> HRW, *Complicit in Crime: State collusion in abductions and child recruitment by the Karuna Group*, January 2007.

<sup>6</sup> HRW, above note 2.

<sup>7</sup> Coalition interview, 2007.

with the strings attached to their whistles ... When we had to run and I couldn't carry my gun anymore, the older ones tried to help by taking my gun and running along with me.”  
–*Htun Myint, describing his training in the Tatmadaw Kyi at age 11 (Myanmar/Burma).*<sup>8</sup>

“They [the army] took us to the barracks. They beat us both with their guns and boots. After 15 days my friend died from the beatings. They beat me repeatedly. Once I was beaten unconscious and taken to the hospital. When I regained consciousness I was taken back to the barracks and beaten again. I nearly died. I don't know why they beat me.”  
–*Ram, recruited in 2004 by the Maoists when he was 14 years old describes his capture by the Royal Nepal Army one year later (Nepal).*<sup>9</sup>

“Sometimes in the bush, the rebels would beat us without mercy whether you made a mistake or not. We would also be made to carry heavy loads on our heads for long distances and made to assemble out in the cold each day as early as 5am.”  
–*Boy age 15, previously abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (Uganda).*<sup>10</sup>

### **Girls and DDR**

“I am now 14. I was with the LURD for two years in 2003 and 2004. I had to tow ammunition and arms for them. They beat me. They did not feed me. I never heard about it and then it was over. I didn't participate in DD [sic] because I did not know if this was an option was for me.”  
–*Esther, former member of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD) (Liberia).*<sup>11</sup>

“I was captured by one of the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) commanders and after 2 years with his wife, I managed to cross into Liberia, losing contact with my commander. I later returned with the intention of disarming with him, but when disarmament started, my commander refused to disarm with me because I failed to marry him. He gave my gun to another girl who agreed to marry him.”  
–*17 year old girl (Sierra Leone).*<sup>12</sup>

“I heard about disarmament from my friends. I couldn't disarm though because I didn't have any ammunition. I have friends that were able to disarm.”  
–*Annie, aged 13 who was with government troops for eight months washing clothes, cooking and carrying rice (Liberia).*<sup>13</sup>

### **The long-term impact**

“I feel pain from the rape, as if I have wounds inside, and I am afraid to have a disease. I would like to get tested but there is nobody to help me. I was tested in the reception centre in Gulu, but I was never told the result. The doctor said that it is better not to know the result.”  
–*Girl age 17, previously abducted by the LRA (Uganda).*<sup>14</sup>

“I was living in Foya when government troops entered. I stayed with them from 1999-2003. I was captured with other small girls. There were eight of us altogether. We were all used by this one commander who would rape all of the eight girls. Now I have stomach problems. I am told that I have an infection but when I take medicine I don't really feel better. I was in my village seeking traditional medicine when

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<sup>8</sup> HRW, above note 2.

<sup>9</sup> HRW, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal*, February 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Coalition, *Returning Home – Children's perspectives on reintegration. A case study of children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Teso, eastern Uganda*, February 2008.

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<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, *Liberia: A flawed process discriminates against women and girls*, March 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Save the Children UK, *Stolen Futures – The reintegration of children affected by armed conflict*, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Coalition, above note 10.

the DDR was going on so I missed out. I am still not all right fully.”

*–Faith, now 18, was 13 when captured by government troops (Liberia).<sup>15</sup>*

“There is a big difference to the time before I was abducted, especially regarding my health. I used to be able to work hard in the garden but now I’m no longer strong and work looks so heavy for me. I can’t perform better yet I have to work hard to earn a living. I really feel weak and sickly, especially in my back and chest.”

*–Male age 18, previously abducted by the LRA (Uganda).<sup>16</sup>*

“Other children insult me and when I try to fight them they run to the teacher’s office. The teacher says ‘If your head is confused because you were abducted, don’t come and disturb others.’ Then the teacher beat me up. I went back with my parents and now it’s a bit better.”

*–Boy, 14, formerly abducted by the LRA (Uganda).<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, above note 11.

<sup>16</sup> Coalition, above note 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

# CHILD SOLDIERS

## Global Report 2008

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### SUMMARY

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was formed in May 1998 by leading nongovernmental organizations to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers, both boys and girls, to secure their demobilization, and to promote their reintegration into their communities. It works to achieve this through advocacy and public education, research and monitoring, and network development and capacity building.

The Coalition's Steering Committee members are: Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office – Geneva. The Coalition has regional representatives in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East and national networks in about 30 countries. The Coalition unites local, national and international organizations, as well as youth, experts and concerned individuals from every region of the world.

*Cover photo © Marcus Bleasdale 2005*

**Girl soldiers and others gathered at a Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) event in Tila, Rolpa district, Nepal.**



**COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS**

**[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)**