

CHILD SOLDIER USE 2003:

A Briefing for the 4th UN Security Council
Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

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...the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

Preamble, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
adopted November 1989; entered into force September
1990

“One day, my friends and I were forced by our commanders to kill a family...I decided I had to flee and I ran away to the forest...but some soldiers found me and brought me back to a military camp. They imprisoned me and beat me every day...Today I am afraid. I don't know how to read, I don't know where my family is. I have no future...My life is lost...At night I can no longer sleep, I keep thinking of those horrible things I have seen and done as a soldier”.

“Kalami”, 15-year-old boy from the Democratic Republic of
Congo who fought with various armed forces from
the age of 9.¹

“Seven weeks after I arrived there was combat...it was an attack on the paramilitaries. We killed about seven of them. They killed one of us. We had to drink their blood to conquer our fear. Only the scared ones had to do it. I was the most scared of all, because I was the newest and the youngest.”

“Adriana”, a Colombian girl recruited to the
opposition Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).
She was 12 at the time of this incident ²

“...other trainees, if they were caught trying to run away their hands and feet were beaten with a bamboo stick, and then put in shackles and beaten and poked again and again, and then they were taken to the lock up”.

Boy from Myanmar abducted at age 13 by government
forces.³

Introduction

The above statements were drawn from reports received by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and its founding member organizations. They provide a horrifying reminder of the plight of children who continue to be used in armed conflict. Throughout 2003 thousands of children were deployed as combatants, to commit abuses against civilians, as sex slaves, forced labourers, messengers, informants and servants in continuing and newly erupting conflicts. Children were usually used to perform multiple

roles, and girls in particular often acted as combatants as well as being sexually exploited.

In some cases, such as **Cote d'Ivoire**, parts of the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC) and **Liberia**, a massive increase in recruitment occurred during 2003. Horrifying reports emerged from the **DRC** of children forced to commit atrocities, of rape and sexual torture, and of constant beatings. Thousands of children in northern **Uganda** continued to flee their homes at night to avoid being abducted by the opposition Lord's Resistance Army and forced into brutal combat and servitude. Yet the abductions continued. In **Myanmar** little if any progress was discerned, with an estimated 70,000 children in the government's armed forces. Exiled children recounted being abducted by government forces while on the way to school and taken to military camps where they were subjected to beatings, forced labour and combat. Disturbing recent reports from **Colombia** revealed that the number of children used by armed groups has increased to around 11,000 in recent years, with children as young as 12 being trained and deployed to use explosives and weapons. In addition to involvement in combat, girls attached to Colombian armed groups have reported the enforced use of contraceptives and abortions, often after pressure to become the "girlfriend" of an adult soldier. In **Sri Lanka** the abduction of children by the armed opposition Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) reportedly continued unabated.

In all the conflicts children were forcibly recruited, sometimes in large numbers. Others enlisted voluntarily as a means of survival in war-torn regions after family, social and economic structures had collapsed. Many said they joined because of poverty, unemployment, or domestic violence, abuse or exploitation. Others reported enlisting after seeing family members tortured or killed by members of government forces or armed opposition groups.

In recent years progress has been made in developing a legal and policy framework for protecting children involved in armed conflict. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict, which came into force in February 2002, prohibits the direct use of any child under the age of 18 in armed conflict and prohibits all use of under-18s by non-state armed groups. By mid-December 2003, 67 states had ratified the Optional Protocol, including seven mentioned in this report.⁴ The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child had begun examining governments' reports on steps taken to implement the Protocol. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) defines the recruitment of children under the age of 15 as a war crime. Convention 182 of the International Labour Organization (1999) defines child soldiering as one of the worst forms of child labour and prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 for use in armed conflict. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999) establishes 18 as the minimum age for all compulsory military recruitment and participation in hostilities.

In 1999, the UN Security Council began to specifically address the protection of children in armed conflict. Since then member states and the international community at large have repeatedly condemned the "despicable and damaging practices"⁵ perpetrated against children during war. The UN has included child protection as an element of peacekeeping operations and has supported demobilization and reintegration programs for former child soldiers. A series of Security Council resolutions have sent a clear message: the targeting of children for violence or for use as soldiers is unacceptable and must be stopped.⁶

In November 2001, the Council took the unusual and unprecedented step of asking the Secretary General to compile a list of specific parties to armed conflict which were recruiting or using child soldiers in violation of their international obligations.⁷ After this list of violators was made public, the Security Council called in January 2003 for a further report on the parties' progress in ending their recruitment or use of child soldiers, and agreed to consider additional appropriate steps against those who failed to show sufficient progress in ending these crimes.⁸

Yet, as this report shows, remarkably little progress has been made in ending the use of child soldiers and some violators have even increased their recruitment of children. This report contains updated information on the recruitment and use of child soldiers in 17 countries from January 2003—that is since the adoption of UN Resolution 1460—through September 2003. It includes a critical review of demobilization programs where they exist, and finds that girls continue to be overlooked and excluded from such programs. This briefing is by no means exhaustive. Available evidence suggests that children are being deployed in additional conflicts around the world.

The information contained in this report was compiled by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers. Some was drawn from research carried out by members of its international steering committee—organizations involved in research, advocacy and child protection programs internationally. Much of the detailed research was carried out by national Coalition members, individuals and organizations working in the countries involved. Information was also provided by former child soldiers.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers believes that determined action is needed by the Security Council to ensure that all parties to armed conflict involved in recruiting and using children are held accountable for their actions. Action must also be taken against those indirectly involved through tacit support for governments or armed groups, or via the provision of arms and financial assistance. This briefing has been prepared in advance of the UN Security Council's fourth open debate on children and armed conflict. We hope it will serve to assist the Security Council and other UN member states in formulating a concerted strategy and the implementation of firm measures to stop the use of children in wars which threaten their life, survival and development in many countries across the world.

¹ *Democratic Republic of Congo: Children At War*, Amnesty International, September 2003.

² *You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia*, Human Rights Watch, September 2003.

³ Testimony received confidentially by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in August 2003.

⁴ The seven are: Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

⁵ Taken from a statement by Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General at the UN Special Session on Children, May 2002.

⁶ These include Resolution 1265 on the Protection of Civilians (1999), Resolution 1314 on Children and Armed Conflict (2000), Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000), Resolution 1379 on Children and Armed Conflict (2001) and Resolution 1460 on Children and Armed Conflict (2003). To download texts visit www.un.org/Docs/sc

⁷ UN Resolution 1379, adopted 20 November 2001.

⁸ UN Resolution 1460, adopted 30 January 2003, paragraph 6.

AFGHANISTAN

Government forces

The Afghan Transitional Administration continued recruiting and training a new Afghan National Army (ANA). As of August 2003, 4000 members had been recruited, although numbers were slated to increase to 70,000 by 2010.¹ The United States-led international coalition continued to train new recruits, along with the United Kingdom and France. There was no indication of under-18s serving in the new government force. In May a presidential decree prohibited the recruitment of children and young people under the age of 22 to Afghanistan's National Army.² On 24 September the transitional government announced Afghanistan's accession to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-CAC).

Non-state armed groups

Armed opposition forces contributed to increasing insecurity, especially outside Kabul. The Taliban continued to be active in the southeast and east of the country. Hundreds of thousands of armed combatants remained with private militia groups engaged in inter-factional fighting, which escalated in recent months.³ In some areas there were reports that armed groups abducted women and girls.⁴ Many children, especially boys, transported small arms and drugs across the border to the North West Frontier Province. Some former child soldiers saw this as an alternative source of income to support their families.⁵

The US military acknowledged that at least three children, aged 13 to 15, were among the detainees held in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. It said they were believed to have participated in armed conflict in Afghanistan.⁶ Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other human rights groups criticized the detention of the children, stating that child detainees should be charged with a recognizable offence, provided with full judicial safeguards and transferred to a suitable juvenile detention facility.⁷ The US government described the children as "very, very dangerous people",⁸ but the US military official in charge of the Guantanamo operations, General Geoffrey Miller, was reportedly seeking to have the children released in recognition of their age and co-operation.⁹

Demobilization and child protection programs

The Afghan Transitional Administration, in collaboration with the UN, was expected to launch a three-year disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program in July.¹⁰ The US Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded a US \$2 million grant to the NGO Consortium for the Psychosocial Care and Protection of Children, comprised of the Christian Children's Fund, the International Rescue Committee and Save the Children Federation, to assist particularly vulnerable Afghan children including former child soldiers.¹¹ Afghan President Hamid Karzai has predicted that it will take no more than a year to disarm former Afghan combatants, estimated at 100,000, but has said that demobilization and reintegration will take longer.¹² In April 2003, Afghan militia commanders agreed to cooperate with the central government on rebuilding the national army.¹³ However, as of August 2003, disarmament in northern Afghanistan had failed because of reluctance on the part of many militia commanders to disarm.¹⁴

In mid-2003, UNICEF estimated that around 8,000 child soldiers had been informally demobilized but not fully reintegrated into society.¹⁵ In some areas demobilized child soldiers have returned home but face problems reintegrating in the absence of vocational training and psychosocial support. In the light of the deteriorating security situation in the provinces, children are at risk of re-recruitment by non-state armed groups.¹⁶

Recommendations

- The UN should increase its dialogue with armed groups in Afghanistan, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- The UN should collaborate with the International Criminal Court to prosecute as war crimes the recruitment and use of children as soldiers on the territory of, and by nationals of, Afghanistan.
- UN agencies should work to ensure that the specific needs of child soldiers are taken into account in general DDR programs.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Afghanistan should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- Child DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies and partners should devote more resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers, particularly in the context of increased insecurity.

¹ IRIN, "Focus on the new national army", 5 June 2003.

² "Unicef praises Afghan child soldier innovation", www.unicef.org/media_14758.html, 23 September 2003

³ IRIN, "Focus on the new national army", 5 June 2003.

⁴ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan – Out of sight, out of mind: The fate of the Afghan returnees", 23 June 2003.

⁵ Save The Children Alliance's Concerns Regarding Children's Rights In Afghanistan, March 2003.

⁶ Human Rights Watch, Letter to Secretary Rumsfeld on Child Detainees at Guantanamo, 24 April 2003.

⁷ Amnesty International, Press Release, 23 April 2003. HRW, Letter to Secretary Rumsfeld on Child Detainees at Guantanamo, *Human Rights Watch Urges Child Protections*, 24 April 2003.

⁸ Toby Harnden, "US defends imprisoning child 'killers'," telegraph.co.uk, 26 April 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2003/04/26/wguan26.xml>.

⁹ BBC, "Guantanamo may free children", 22 August 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/3172617.stm>

¹⁰ Amnesty International, "Afghanistan – Out of sight, out of mind: The fate of the Afghan returnees", 23 June 2003; Reuters, "Afghans, UN launch crucial disarmament plan", 6 April 2003.

¹¹ Christian Children's Fund, "CCF Receives USAID Grant to Provide Assistance for Afghanistan's Most Vulnerable Children", April 13, 2003 at <www.christianchildrensfund.org/about_ccf/Press_Releases/USAID_Afghanistan>

¹² AFP, "Afghan ex-combatants to be disarmed in a year, Karzai says", 21 February 2003.

¹³ IRIN, "Focus on the new national army", 5 June 2003.

¹⁴ UN OCHA, "Afghanistan: Demobilisation conference expected to boost security", 20 February 2003.

¹⁵ Information received from UNICEF, July 2003.

¹⁶ Save The Children Alliance's Concerns Regarding Children's Rights In Afghanistan, March 2003.

ANGOLA

Government forces

Some child soldiers recruited during the civil war remained within the Angolan armed forces (FAA), although many will have reached the age of majority. Some under-age soldiers may remain in the FAA.¹

Demobilization and child protection programs

In March 2003 the Angolan government, UNICEF and civil society partners reaffirmed their policy on former child soldiers.² The Ministry of Assistance and Social Reinsertion formalized its commitment to intensify efforts in birth registration, family tracing and reunification, education and training. The policy specifically addressed the needs of children in the former opposition reception areas and newly accessible areas. It intended to assist former child soldiers through access to identity and citizenship, family reunification, education and vocation opportunities. UNICEF stated that healing psychosocial wounds of former child soldiers and reuniting them with their families was important for Angola's long-term recovery.³ According to UNICEF, by July 2003 the last of the children demobilized from the FAA would have returned to their families.⁴ Under an International Committee of the Red Cross program to reunite families—particularly children pressed into service by the opposition National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) including child soldiers—some 225 children had been reunited with their families by the end of 2002 and another 750 were scheduled to be reunited by June 2003.⁵ As many as 11,000 children were involved in the last years of fighting.⁶

Women and girls taken as “wives” by UNITA feared exclusion from government aid.⁷ One NGO working in Angola estimated that up to 30,000 female children were abducted during the war.⁸ The current disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program restricted assistance to UNITA soldiers, preventing “wives” and abducted women and girls from gaining access to it. Refugees International voiced concern over the possible negative reception these women and girls may face on return to their villages, since they were often used to cook, clean and carry supplies for soldiers.⁹ UNITA has also expressed concern about thousands of UNITA health professionals and teachers who have not yet received confirmation from the government that they would be integrated into the country's health and education system.¹⁰

According to Human Rights Watch, existing demobilization and reintegration programs discriminated against child soldiers, many of whom carried out the same duties as adults during the conflict.¹¹ While adult combatants received identification cards, resettlement kits and food assistance from the government, many child soldiers were excluded, receiving only an identification card and food aid. Specific programs are needed to address the needs of girls who were used as cooks, domestics, porters and sexual slaves.¹²

Recommendations

- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority or are currently displaced, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.

- UN agencies should ensure that existing plans for community-based rehabilitation include provisions for former child soldiers appropriate to their needs.

¹ Information received from Human Rights Watch, 24 June 2003.

² UNICEF, "New Phase in Action for Separated Children and Child Soldiers in Angola", 7 March 2003.

³ UNICEF, "New Phase in Action for Separated Children and Child Soldiers in Angola", 7 March 2003; IRIN, "Rehabilitation of child soldiers critical, UNICEF", 10 March 2003.

⁴ Email communication to Human Rights Watch from Akhil Iyer, Senior Program Officer, UNICEF Angola, 27 June 2003.

⁵ US State Department Official, electronic communication, 12 February 2003 cited in the US Department of Labour's 2002 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 18 April 2003.

⁶ HRW, "Forgotten Fighters: Child Soldiers in Angola", April 2003.

⁷ IRIN, "Angola: UNITA "wives" fear exclusion from government aid", 10 March 2003.

⁸ Christian Children's Fund, "Peace in Angola Brings Critical Needs", at www.christianchildrensfund.org/emergencies/Angola_peace.

⁹ IRIN, "Angola: UNITA "wives" fear exclusion from government aid", 10 March 2003.

¹⁰ IRIN, "UNITA welcomes vocational training for ex-soldiers", 31 March 2003.

¹¹ HRW, "Forgotten Fighters: Child Soldiers in Angola", April 2003.

¹² HRW, "Forgotten Fighters: Child Soldiers in Angola", April 2003.; IRIN, 29/04/2003

BURUNDI

Government forces

The government of Burundi recognized the existence of child soldiers within its ranks and made international commitments to stop recruitment and promote demobilization. Child soldiers continued to be used by the Burundian armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ostensibly to combat the presence of the *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie – Forces pour la défense et la démocratie* (CNDD-FDD).¹ In April 2003, Burundi's parliament voted unanimously to recognise the Statute of the International Criminal Court. The government ratified the United Nations (UN) Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and set 18 as the minimum recruitment age. National legislation had yet to be modified to reflect international commitments. Legal standards proved difficult to implement, given challenges to control over recruitment practices by government forces and paramilitaries in the interior.² According to a UN estimate about 14,000 children had carried or were still carrying arms in the ranks of government forces or armed opposition groups.³

Non-state armed groups

Child recruitment by armed opposition groups escalated during the year because of increased instability brought about by the change in government. The Mugabarabona faction of the *Parti de libération du peuple Hutu – Forces nationales de libération* (PALIPEHUTU-FNL) and the CNDD-FDD (Ndayikengurukiye faction) inflated their numbers to gain recognition and bargaining power in the peace accords and undertook massive child recruitment in the period leading up to the change in president.⁴ Armed opposition groups remained largely inaccessible, making it difficult to engage in public education or demobilization activities. Scores of child soldiers from the PALIPEHUTU-FNL (Rwasa faction) were killed during an attack on Bujumbura in July 2003.⁵

The main Hutu-dominated armed political group, the CNDD-FDD (Nkurunziza faction), which has rear bases in eastern DRC, reportedly continued to recruit and abduct children, including from schools and from refugee camps in neighbouring Tanzania. Children as young as eight were recruited, sometimes forcibly.⁶

Demobilization and child protection programs

The Government of Burundi collaborated with UNICEF to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers. A committee, which brought together the ministries of human rights, defence and national security, interior and public security, and social action, began to identify child soldiers within government forces and provided training for army officers on the issue. The project, which was launched in June 2003, was set to start with the demobilization of 3000 child soldiers, of which 1000 were from government armed forces. Another 1,500 were to be drawn from the “*guardiens de la paix*” (community self-defence forces aligned with the Government) and a further 500 from the FDD.⁷ UNICEF raised concerns about the difficulty of access to children from armed opposition groups.⁸ Following an initial study of child soldiers, the International Labour Organization planned a program of socio-economic support to former child soldiers. Former child soldiers who were no longer children faced particular challenges, since they could not benefit from

child soldiers demobilization programs and there was concern they might return to fighting.⁹

Recommendations

- The government of Burundi should bring domestic legislation into line with international law prohibiting recruitment and use of children under 18.
- The UN should enter into increased dialogue and negotiations with PALIPEHUTU-FNL and CNDD-FDD to call on them to immediately stop child recruitment and cooperate with UN agencies on the demobilization and reintegration of children within their ranks.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Burundi should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.

¹ Information provided by Amnesty International, August 2003.

² IRIN, "Winning back Burundi's Child Soldiers", 12 May 2003.

³ PANA, "Burundi demobilising child soldiers", 20 August 2003.

⁴ Information obtained from reliable Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition) sources in Burundi during meetings in Bujumbura, 9-11 March 2003 and presented by Burundi Coalition representatives, Great Lakes Coalition meeting, Kampala, 12-13 June.

⁵ Information provided by Amnesty International, August 2003.

⁶ Information provided by Amnesty International, August 2003.

⁷ ABP, "3000 enfants soldats vont être démobilisés", Bujumbura, 26 April 2003.

⁸ Information presented by UNICEF at Great Lakes Coalition meeting, Kampala, 13 June 2003.

⁹ Information presented by JAMAA-Burundi at Great Lakes Coalition meeting, Kampala, 12 June 2003.

COLOMBIA

Government forces

There were no indications of government forces recruiting under-18s as soldiers. However, reports emerged of children being used for intelligence work or as informants, sometimes in exchange for cash or gifts. On 19 May 2003 it was reported that members of the Colombian army offered 15,000 Colombian pesos to an 11-year-old boy for information about the Humanitarian Area “Esperanza de Dios”, department of Chocó.¹ Children and young people have also reportedly been offered economic incentives to become involved in the conflict as “peasant soldiers”.² The “peasant soldier” scheme, launched by the Colombian government at the end of 2002, aimed to increase the size of the military by creating a peasant army of 20,000 troops. The government also hoped to create a network of peasant informers who would supply the army with intelligence.³

The government continued its “soldier for a day” program to expose children to the army through recreational activities and visits to military facilities. In some regions, the national army also reportedly used children to encourage members of their families to desert armed groups. For example, in Arauca army personnel allegedly gave children fake Colombian banknotes with a message on the back inviting people to abandon armed groups.⁴ On 19 May 2003, the Attorney General requested the withdrawal of the “soldier for a day” program in Arauca, claiming that it was a risk to children’s lives.⁵

On 5 August 2002 the Colombian government ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which defines the recruitment of children under the age of 5 as a war crime. However, when ratifying, the government made a declaration under Article 124 of the Statute, stating that it would not accept the jurisdiction of the Court over war crimes committed by its nationals or on its territory for seven years after the Statute entered into force in Colombia (1 November 2003). A declaration under Article 124 may be withdrawn at any time.⁶

Non-state armed groups

Non-state armed groups and paramilitaries continued to recruit and use children, including children under the age of fifteen, in different regions of Colombia such as Alto Naya⁷ and Tierradentro.⁸ According to a report published in September by Human Rights Watch, more than 11,000 children were fighting in irregular armies, including paramilitaries and urban militias.⁹ Children interviewed by Human Rights Watch said they joined when they were 14 or younger. Both girls and boys said they received military training at around age 13 and that participation in combat came soon afterwards.¹⁰

Regulations of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) stipulated that fifteen was the minimum age for recruitment but this standard was not respected. FARC members reportedly pressured indigenous people to become involved in the armed conflict¹¹ and media reports in May and June indicated that the FARC had recruited adolescents from native Amazonian tribes in Brazil.¹² According to the Colombian authorities a 10-year-old boy used by the FARC to deliver a bomb was killed on 17 April 2003 after the bicycle he rode up to a military checkpoint exploded.¹³ Female recruits in the FARC, who reportedly made up one third of their forces, were subjected to sexual harassment and forced to use birth

control or have abortions if they became pregnant.¹⁴ In June 2003 a pregnant girl abandoned the FARC and, according to military sources, declared that she had been victim of sexual abuse.¹⁵

The *Ejército Nacional de Liberación*, National Liberation Army (ELN), also recruited children including in violation of their own internal regulations which put fifteen as the minimum recruitment age. Reports indicate that some indigenous families fled their homes to avoid recruitment by the ELN.¹⁶

Children were recruited and used by paramilitary groups such as the government-linked Colombian United Self-Defence Groups, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), and in some cases were offered a salary of US \$100 or more¹⁷ or provided with money or clothes in exchange for services.¹⁸ The AUC has established 18 as the minimum age for recruitment, but continued to recruit children, including under 15s. Human Rights Watch reported that of 12 former AUC combatants it interviewed, only three were aged 15 or above when recruited.¹⁹

Demobilization and child protection programs

On 22 January 2003 the government published Decree 128, which amended Laws 548 (1999) and 782 (2002), dealing with the reintegration of voluntarily demobilized soldiers, including child soldiers. Article 22 of Decree 128 forbids the use of children in intelligence activities by any group, including armed forces.²⁰ However Article 13 of the decree could provide amnesty for paramilitaries and members of armed groups who recruit or use children in hostilities.²¹

According to the Colombian Defence Ministry, 110 children were demobilized between January and June 2003. Most had escaped or were captured by government forces.²² On 12 June 2003 AUC released 40 soldiers aged between 14 and 17 to the government and UNICEF for demobilization.²³ The Colombian press reported that the ELN had also liberated some child soldiers.²⁴ On 20 August, the Colombian High Commissioner for Peace announced that the demobilization of AUC members would begin in September and that by the end of the year between 1,500 and 2,000 members of AUC would be demobilized. It was not known whether any special provision would be made for children.²⁵

Recommendations

- The United Nations (UN) Security Council should encourage the Colombian government to complete the process of ratifying the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-CAC), and to declare its commitment to a “straight-18” standard for recruitment.
- Non-state armed groups including paramilitaries should declare their commitment to the CRC-OP-CAC and also a “straight-18” standard for recruitment.
- The UN should urge the government to withdraw its declaration under Article 124 of the Rome Statute.
- The UN should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Colombia, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.

- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Colombia should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, indigenous and afro-Caribbean children, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies should encourage the Colombian government to revise military and criminal code provisions regarding children who take part in hostilities or are recruited into armed forces or groups, in accordance with international standards of juvenile justice.
- The UN should encourage the Colombian government to provide alternatives to military recruitment, such as increasing employment and education opportunities. The Colombian government should also be encouraged to eliminate the “soldier for a day” program that promotes a military culture among children.

¹ Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, Informe ejecutivo 23, Acción preventiva Cacarica-Cavida. 21st May 2003. Cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

² Comisión Intereclesial de Justicia y Paz, Informe ejecutivo 24. Acción preventiva Cacarica-Cavida. 27th May 2003. Cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

³ BBC World News, 17 June 2003.

⁴ Revista Semana “La reconquista de Arauca”, febrero 2 al 8 de 2003. Cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

⁵ Banco de Datos de Derechos Humanos y Violencia Política, Cinep & Justicia y Paz, Boletín No. 6, diciembre 19 de 2003 a 10 de febrero de 2003, Cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

⁶ Coalición contra la vinculación de niños, niñas y jóvenes al conflicto armado en Colombia, “Análisis jurídico de legislación internacional y colombiana”, January 2003

⁷ Informe de la Comisión humanitaria de verificación del Alto Naya, Santander de Quilichao – Colombia, entre los días 5 y 11 de abril de 2003. ONIC, CRIC, ORIVAC, ACIN, ACIVA RP, Comité de Desplazados del Alto Naya, CORPOJURÍDICA AC, CODHES, MINGA, REDEPAZ, Fundación Hemera, la Defensoría del Pueblo Delegada para el Naya, Secretaría de Gobierno de la Gobernación del Cauca. Cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

⁸ Asociaciones de Cabildos Indígenas Juan Tama y Nasa Çxhaçxa, Asociación Campesina de Inzá - Tierradentro, Comunicado a la opinión pública, February 2003

⁹ Human Rights Watch, *You’ll Learn Not to Cry*, *Child Combatants in Colombia*, September 2003.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch submission to the UN’s Special Representative to the Secretary-General for children in armed conflict, 7 July 2003.

¹¹ Interview with a social assistant for the indigenous communities of Vaupes region. Second term of 2003, cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003; Martha Colorado, Ruta Pacífica, “En Colombia las mujeres tejen lazos amorosos en medio de la guerra”, April 2003.

¹² “Guerrilha colombiana atua na Amazônia, diz arcebispo,” *Jornal do Senado*, 27 June 2003; “Brazil fears FARC recruiting,” CNN, 21 May 2003; “Rio Police Seize Cocaine Linked to Colombia’s FARC,” *The Washington Post*, 21 May 2003.

¹³ BBC News, 18/04/2003; UNICEF-Colombia, Situation Report, 22/04/2003.

¹⁴ Defensoría del Pueblo y UNICEF, “La niñez en el conflicto armado colombiano”. Boletín La niñez y sus derechos No 8, December 2002. http://www.defensoria.org.co/espanol/informes/pdfs/informe_9.pdf

¹⁵ El Tiempo, “34 desertores de la guerrilla y de los paramilitares se reinsertarán en Valle y Antioquia”, Junio 9 de 2003

¹⁶ El Tiempo, 28 de Febrero, 2003, “Indígenas kankuamos del Cesar huyen de reclutamiento del Eln”, cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

¹⁷ El Tiempo, “Paramilitares de Córdoba envían cadáveres de sus combatientes al barrio donde vivían”, Abril 1 de 2003, cited in Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

¹⁸ Interviews with young people, Coalition against the involvement of boys, girls and youth in the armed conflict in Colombia, June 2003.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch submission to the UN’s Special Representative to the Secretary-General for children in armed conflict, 7 July 2003.

²⁰ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, *1379 Report*, November 2002.

²¹ Decreto número 128 de 2003. <http://bib.minjusticia.gov.co/normas/decretos/2003/d01282003.htm>.

²² http://www.mindefensa.gov.co/desmovilizacion/desmovilizados_estadistica_200301_a_0612.xls

²³ UN news, “Colombia: UNICEF welcomes demobilization of 40 child soldiers”, 13 June 2003

²⁴ BBC World, 13 June 2003.

²⁵ “Colombia: paras se desmovilizan”, BBCMundo.com, 23 August 2003.

CONGO, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE (DRC)

Government forces

The Congolese Armed Forces (FAC) continued to have children in their ranks despite commitments to demobilization. Only 280 FAC child soldiers had been released by August 2003, out of a total of 1,500 children scheduled for demobilization from July 2001.¹ According to Amnesty International, the Congolese Government appeared not to be actively recruiting child soldiers into the regular armed forces, but it provided military support to armed groups such as *Mai-Mai* and the *Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie-mouvement de libération* (RCD-ML), which continued to recruit child soldiers.² From January 2003, the *Mai-Mai*, most of whom are aligned to the government, continued to recruit and use child soldiers.³ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition) members in DRC detected heavy recruitment of children by the *Mai-Mai* between March and August 2003 in Walungo, Mwenga, Shabunda, Fizi and Buyankiri, in South-Kivu.⁴

Non-state armed groups

All armed opposition groups continued to recruit and use children in violation of international obligations, leading some observers to describe fighting forces as “armies of children”. Following the intensification of conflict in Ituri, the *Union des patriotes congolais* (UPC) increased its recruitment of girls and boys, some as young as seven, to serve as soldiers or domestic servants.⁵

A French-led multinational peacekeeping force was deployed in Bunia, eastern DRC in June 2003. The area and Ituri in particular, arguably had the highest percentage of children serving as soldiers in the various armed groups. The groups included the Hema militias, especially the UPC, as well as Ngiti and Lendu militias, who used children as young as 8 years old.⁶ According to UNICEF there were between 8,000 and 10,000 child soldiers in the Congolese Armed Forces and armed groups in Ituri town alone.⁷

On 7 February 2003 UPC leader Thomas Lubanga reportedly decreed that “each family in the area under its control must contribute to the war effort by providing a cow, money, or a child” for the UPC.⁸ The UPC also undertook forced round-ups in schools.⁹ The *Mouvement pour la libération du Congo* (MLC) also continued to use child soldiers but decreased the visibility of children within its ranks and increasingly referred to them as “volunteers”.¹⁰

The armed wing of the *Rassemblement congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma* (RCD-Goma), supported by the government of Rwanda, confirmed to a United Nations (UN) officer that it had been recruiting children into its ranks.¹¹ RCD-Goma also undertook campaigns, including in local schools, to encourage enlistment by children and youth.¹² The RCD-Goma actively recruited demobilized child soldiers formerly with the *Mai-Mai*.¹³ Many RCD-Goma commanders and authorities used child soldiers as their personal guards. Child soldiers were also victims of extrajudicial executions in North Kivu. A boy from Masisi, was arrested in Uvira by RCD-Goma soldiers on 25 May 2003 after allegedly killing a soldier the night before. He was tried and was publicly executed the same day.¹⁴

Reliable reports indicated that the splinter groups *RCD-National* and *RCD-Kisangani/Mouvement de libération* also continued to recruit and use children, with some reports indicating that between 20 and 25 per cent of the troops were children.¹⁵ Up to 40 per cent of the *Mudundu 40*, backed by the Rwandese government were estimated to be child soldiers.¹⁶

Local Defence Forces (LDF), established to protect communities from militias, continued to recruit children as young as ten in North Kivu. Some underwent training in Mukati camp before being integrated into the RCD-Goma army. Hundreds of children have been enrolled into the LDF during 2003.¹⁷

Armed opposition groups from other countries, including the *ex-Forces armées rwandaises* (ex-FAR), Rwandese *Interhamwe* and the Burundian *Force pour la défense de la démocratie* (FDD), continued to recruit and use children in the DRC.¹⁸

Despite the mandate extension of the UN mission in the DRC (MONUC) until the end of July 2004, its increased military strength (from 8,700 to 10,800 soldiers) and the imposition of an arms embargo against all foreign and Congolese armed groups in the east, Coalition members reported an increase in the flow of weapons to eastern DRC and the continuous recruitment of child soldiers.¹⁹ Abductions of children by the RCD-ML were reported in Beni, North Kivu, in August 2003. In July 2003, the *Armée du peuple congolais* (APC) re-recruited dozens of children who had been demobilized by the *Mai-Mai* in June 2003. They were taken to training camps in Eringeti, Watalinga and other places near the Ugandan border.²⁰

Coalition member organizations noted continuous recruitment of children by armed groups in South Kivu, notably by *RCD-Goma*. The Coalition in DRC recorded recruitment of children between May and August 2003 on the isle of Idjwi, Kabare, Walungo, Uvira and Bukavu, in South Kivu. Those children were taken to training camps in Nyamunyunye, Mwenga, Shabunda, Fizi and Kihumba.²¹

Demobilization and child protection programs

In April 2003, UNDP and UNICEF organized the first national meeting on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), bringing together all parties to the conflict, as well as key international and local NGOs. This was a positive step towards increased commitment to and coordination of DDR processes for child soldiers. However, re-recruitment of demobilized child soldiers continued to be a widespread problem in the DRC. As all parties to the conflict continued to recruit children, demobilization programs appeared in most cases to be a public relations exercise. Very few girls were demobilized, highlighting gender inequalities in current processes and the need for specific interventions to identify, demobilize and reintegrate girls involved in fighting forces.

The UPC abandoned around 40 child soldiers in April 2003. The children were located by MONUC and local NGOs. This figure was just a small fraction of the thousands of children still serving in the UPC.²²

On 9 July 2003, an RCD-ML leader announced that 45 children, allegedly members of the *Mai-Mai*, had been demobilized in the RCD-ML-held city of Lumumbashi, Katanga

province and entrusted to staff from a Coalition member organisation in DRC.²³ RCD-ML, however, continued to recruit children.

RDC-Goma demobilized several dozen children in the first half of 2003. For example, 66 children (among them six girls) were released from a training camp in South-Kivu in August 2003. Most were former members of local defence groups, *Mudundu 40* or the *Mai-Mai*. Children demobilized from RCD-Goma were cared for in demobilization centres in Goma and Bukavu, with the support of UNICEF, Save the Children, Don Bosco and other NGOs. RDC-Goma refused to demobilize children aged 17 or over and some LDF groups refused demobilization orders, denying that they were associated with the RCD-Goma army.²⁴ RCD-Goma authorities in Uvira, South-Kivu announced in July 2003 that they would refuse any request for additional transfer of former child soldiers into demobilization centres.²⁵

As of February 2003, there were two demobilization centres in operation in RCD-ML-held territory, for ex RCD-ML soldiers as well as ex-*Mai-Mai*. Both centres were run by Let's Protect Children, a Coalition member. A third centre, on the outskirts of Beni, was opened in March 2003, sheltering some 80 children, most of who were former RCD-ML soldiers.²⁶ The RCD-ML refused to contribute to the running of these centres and in March 2003 an RCD-ML commander reportedly re-recruited 19 children from one of the centres.²⁷

Recommendations

- The UN should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in the DRC. It should call on the transitional government of national unity (formed in July 2003), on the armed groups and militias not represented in it to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- The UN should collaborate with the International Criminal Court to prosecute as a war crime the recruitment and use of children as soldiers on the territory of, and by nationals of, the DRC.
- The UN should take decisive steps to reinforce the arms embargo imposed by the UN Security Council on eastern DRC and to minimize the flow of small arms to the country, which is fuelling the conflict and facilitating the use of child soldiers.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in the DRC should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies and partners should devote more resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers once they leave transit centres.
- MONUC should be strengthened in human and financial resources to fulfil its mandate to monitor and report on human rights abuses, including child soldiering.

¹ UNICEF/BUNADER, *Évaluation de la phase pilote du Program de démobilisation et réinsertion des enfants soldats dans la région de Kinshasa*, November 2002.

² Information received from Amnesty International (AI), August 2003

³ Information received from Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers members in the DRC, June 2003.

⁴ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, September 2003.

⁵ Information provided by Human Rights Watch, June 2003.

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- ⁶ Information provided by Human Rights Watch, June 2003.
- ⁷ AFP, 6 June 2003
- ⁸ IRIN report, 7 February 2003, www.irinnews.org
- ⁹ Information provided by Human Rights Watch, June 2003.
- ¹⁰ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, 1 June 2003; Confidential report from UN official, 29 April 2003.
- ¹¹ Confidential report from UN officer, 27 March 2003.
- ¹² Confidential report from UN officer, 27 March 2003; Reports from Coalition members
- ¹³ Information received from credible Coalition sources, 2 February 2003.
- ¹⁴ Information received from AI, August 2003.
- ¹⁵ Information received from Coalition members, June 2003.
- ¹⁶ GRAM, Press Release, 21 April 2003; Confidential report from UN officer, 29 April 2003.
- ¹⁷ Information received from AI, August 2003
- ¹⁸ Information received from Coalition members in Burundi and DRC, March 2003 and June 2003.
- ¹⁹ The UNSC resolution 1493 of July 2003, the UN Security Council imposed an arms embargo on the Kivus provinces and Ituri district of eastern DRC.
- ²⁰ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, September 2003
- ²¹ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, September 2003.
- ²² Information received from AI, August 2003.
- ²³ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, July 2003
- ²⁴ Information received from AI, August 2003.
- ²⁵ Information received from AI, August 2003
- ²⁶ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, September 2003
- ²⁷ Information received from Coalition members in the DRC, September 2003

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

Government forces

United Nations (UN) officials, peacekeeping forces and residents reported that government armed forces continued to recruit young Liberians from refugee camps in the western part of the country.¹ Human Rights Watch (HRW) also documented cases of Liberian mercenaries, including child soldiers, being recruited by the government of Côte d'Ivoire in refugee camps and transit centres in Abidjan or Nicla peace camp. There were also reports of recruitment in Liberia (Tobli) and even in Ghana. Most Liberian mercenaries belonged to the two main armed opposition groups in Liberia: the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).² In many cases, child soldiers were allowed to loot in lieu of payment or promised salaries and arms and an agreement that once successful in their mission they could retain their weapons and return to fight in Liberia.³ Some 3,000 young recruits, many of whom were students, also enrolled in the regular army.⁴

Non-state armed groups

Reports indicated the recruitment and use of child soldiers by the armed opposition groups Movement for Justice and Peace (MJP), Ivorian Popular Movement for the Great West (MPIGO) and Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI). Closure of schools in opposition-held areas increased children's vulnerability to voluntary and forcible recruitment.⁵

Among opposition forces in the west, HRW documented a strong presence of Liberian fighters, including children as young as nine years old armed with machine guns.⁶ The UN Panel of Experts on Liberia specifically referred to the forcible recruitment of Liberian refugees, including children, in Côte d'Ivoire by Liberian armed opposition groups.⁷ According to observers, among every Liberian unit of five or six fighters linked to the MPIGO in western Côte d'Ivoire would usually be at least one child soldier. The combatants probably also included former members of Charles Taylor's "Small Boys Units", as some of them described starting young in Liberia, fighting in Sierra Leone and Liberia and having a contract to continue fighting in Togo.⁸ HRW also documented cases of recruitment of Liberian and Ivorian children in Côte d'Ivoire by MODEL, an armed opposition group in Liberia to fight in the neighboring conflict.⁹

Demobilization and child protection programs

On 11 July 2003 the official international headquarters for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process was set up in Bouake. The office was composed of UN officials, French military commanders from operation "Licorne", and representatives for the Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (FANCI) and the three main armed opposition groups: MPCI, MPIGO and MJP.

Save the Children and UNICEF negotiated with the MPCI, which agreed in principle to demobilize children currently bearing arms.¹⁰ Other armed opposition groups agreed to a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process for child soldiers, coordinated by UNICEF.¹¹ However, the DDR plan did not include Liberian opposition

groups operating in the west and it was not clear whether it would include Liberians who were still involved in Ivorian government and opposition forces.¹²

Recommendations

- The UN Secretary General should bring the situation in Côte d'Ivoire to the attention of the Security Council through the application of Article 99 of the UN Charter. The Conflict in Côte d'Ivoire has a regional dimension that seriously threatens the stability of the region. Such expansion critically affects Liberian refugee children, being forcibly recruited in Côte d'Ivoire.
- The UN should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- The UN should urge the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and other relevant international instruments.
- UN agencies should address cross-border recruitment of child soldiers, with particular attention to the use of Liberian children by all parties to the conflict.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire should establish coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- DDR programs should include Liberian children currently involved in armed groups in Côte d'Ivoire, including the Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire.
- UN agencies and partners should devote more resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers, particularly among displaced populations.

¹ IRIN, "Côte d'Ivoire: Army continues giving guns to Liberian refugees", 12 May 2003.

² HRW, "Trapped between two wars: violence against civilians in western Côte d'Ivoire", August 2003

³ HRW, "Trapped between two wars: violence against civilians in western Côte d'Ivoire", August 2003

⁴ IPS, "Belligerents Recruit Child Soldiers", 23 January 2003.

⁵ IPS, "Belligerents Recruit Child Soldiers", 23 January 2003.

⁶ HRW, "Open Letter to UN Security Council", 14 April 2003.

⁷ UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, S/2003/498, 24 April 2003.

⁸ HRW, "Trapped between two wars: violence against civilians in western Côte d'Ivoire", August 2003.

⁹ HRW, "Trapped between two wars: violence against civilians in western Côte d'Ivoire", August 2003.

¹⁰ IRIN, "Liberia: Child Soldiers are back on the Frontline", 9 June 2003.

¹¹ Economic Community of West African States official, confidential report, April 2003.

¹² Information received from Save the Children, 30 June 2003.

INDONESIA

Government forces

On 19 May 2003 military emergency status was declared in the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam province (known as Aceh). The Indonesian armed forces declared at the time that they had approximately 40,000 police and soldiers in Aceh, fighting an estimated 5,000 members of the armed opposition Free Aceh Movement (GAM).¹ The military emergency was initially declared for a six-month period but on 4 September the Indonesian armed forces chief suggested that military operations could last until the GAM no longer posed a security threat.² In June it was reported that the Indonesian police force had lowered the age for recruitment into the police force in Sumatra (where Aceh is located) from 18 to 17.³

In May, UNICEF warned of an emerging humanitarian crisis, with thousands of children affected by internal displacement, the burning of some 500 schools and the disruption of health and sanitation services. Since the declaration of the military emergency, access to Aceh has been highly restricted and the province has virtually closed to outsiders.⁴ Activities by Indonesian or foreign NGOs deemed to run counter to the aims of the military emergency administration are banned. All humanitarian assistance must be coordinated by the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare, and special passes must be obtained by relief workers for travel within the province.⁵

While there were no reports of children being involved in Indonesian military forces, children as young as 11 were reportedly killed by government security forces after being accused of GAM membership.⁶ In May, a military spokesman said that ten people from four villages in the area had been shot, including a 13-year-old. The spokesman claimed the victims were GAM members shot during a clash that began with an explosion at a bridge. A police supervisor reportedly said "don't look at their ages [but at] what they have done".⁷ Indonesia's human rights commission has noted strong indications of "extrajudicial killings" during the incident, although it has yet to reach a conclusion as to which party was responsible. According to the head of the team that visited Aceh "two children were among the victims [of extrajudicial killings]. Children cannot become the shooting target of either side."⁸

The work of human rights defenders, including the investigation of alleged human rights violations by both the security forces and GAM, has virtually ceased since the declaration of the military emergency. Research projects and training seminars on children's rights and child soldier issues have been suspended because in the prevailing climate there were fears that such activities could result in military harassment. Human rights activists, including those known to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, reported that suspected activists have been arrested and harassed and their phone and internet communications monitored by the security forces.⁹

Non-state armed groups

Indonesian armed forces have reported the presence of armed teenagers within GAM.¹⁰ In June military forces arrested two teenagers they said were attempting to set fire to a school building in North Aceh. According to military reports, the teenagers were forced to join GAM and had burned down 60 school buildings over the past three years.¹¹ The Stockholm-based GAM leadership have denied using child soldiers and in June said

they would be willing to let independent observers carry out investigations if the Indonesian Government would permit this.¹²

Demobilization and child protection programs

Little information was available on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs in Aceh. Government and international programs focused on humanitarian interventions. The official figure for people displaced by military operations stood at 40,000 in mid-July but the number was constantly shifting, as some communities were allowed to return and others required to move to allow military operations to attack suspected GAM bases. The Indonesian government pledged some US\$40 million for humanitarian aid, including for displacement camps, but press reports indicated that medical and sanitation provisions were woefully inadequate.¹³

In June the government said it would provide land, tools, seeds and fertilizers, to GAM members who surrendered.¹⁴ In July the National Commission for the Protection of Children (*Komnas Anak*), the State Ministry of Women's Empowerment, the Office of the Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare and private corporations jointly announced plans to establish a number of shelters as rehabilitation centres for children affected by the armed conflict.¹⁵ In August, the Indonesian Government funded a rehabilitation skills-training program in the Masjid Raya subdistrict of Aceh. The five month program, which was reportedly for 381 captured GAM members and supporters, aimed to assist ex-combatants to return to normal activities.¹⁶

Recommendations

- The United Nations (UN) Security Council should urge the Indonesian Government to permit humanitarian workers and independent human rights monitors free and unhindered access to Aceh.
- The UN Security Council should urge the Indonesian government to permit independent observers to visit Aceh and monitor the situation of children involved in the conflict, as well as to research child soldier issues.
- The UN should support efforts to continue the peace process between the government and GAM and urge them to respect their obligations under international humanitarian law, especially on the protection of civilians and children and the use of child soldiers.
- The UN should urge the Indonesian Government to ensure that recruitment age for police is 18 in all Indonesia's provinces.
- The UN should urge the Indonesian Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-CAC) as soon as possible.
- Armed opposition groups should declare their commitment to the CRC-OP-CAC and a "straight 18" standard for recruitment.

¹ "Indonesian military in full control of Aceh," The News (Internet Edition), 28 May 2003, <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/may2003-daily/28-05-2003/world/w1.htm>

² "Indonesian military offensive in Aceh could last until April," *Agence France Presse*, 4 September 2003

³ Coalition member interview with Aceh-based human rights activist, 16 June 2003.

⁴ "Humanitarian aid needed for children in Aceh", UNICEF press release, 23 May 2003

⁵ "Aceh: how not to win hearts and minds", Indonesia briefing, International Crisis Group, 23 July 2003, "Government to curb foreign NGOs in Aceh", *Jakarta Post*, 26 June 2003

⁶ Powell, Sian, "Children massacred by military," Daily Telegraph, 23 May 2003; de Guzman, Orlando, "They killed them one by one," BBC News, 21 May 2003; Time, "Young Blood," 2 June 2003.

⁷ Powell, Sian, "Aceh children first to die," *The Australian*, 23 May 2003.

⁸ Reuters, "Signs of Extrajudicial Killings in Aceh – Commission," 13 June 2003, <http://reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml?type=worldNews&storyID=2924837>

⁹ *Indonesia: protecting the protectors, human rights defenders and humanitarian workers in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam*, ASA 21/024/2003, 23 June 2003

¹⁰ Nunan, Patricia, "Ceasefire Brings Uneasy Peace To Indonesia's Aceh Province," *Voice of America*, 24 March 2003, <http://www.kabar-irian.com/pipermail/kabar-indonesia/2003-March/000292.html>

¹¹ "No separatist rebel to be allowed to escape, says Minister", <http://www.kbri-canberra.org.au/brief/2003/jun>, 8 June 2003

¹² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2976868.stm>, 9 June 2003

¹³ "Indonesia briefing, Aceh: how not to win hearts and minds", International Crisis Group, 23 July 2003.

¹⁴ *The New Zealand Herald*, "Indonesia Pledges land for Rebels who Surrender," 23 June 2003.

¹⁵ *Jakarta Post* online, "Child Commission to visit Aceh victims", 4 July 2003, www.thejakartapost.com

¹⁶ *Indonesia Consolidated Situation Report, No. 142*, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 16 to 22 August 2003

ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Government forces

After signing the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OP-CRC -CAC) in November 2002, the government later ended the "early admission" of conscripts and the deployment of under-18s in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF), although it continued to accept 17-year-old volunteers.

Palestinian and Israeli NGOs working with juvenile detainees informally reported to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers that under-18s were recruited as informers by Israeli intelligence agencies, but no published documentation existed. The Israeli government continued to detain suspected members of *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad*, including juveniles under the age of 18, holding them in cells with adults in violation of Israel's international obligations. The youths were held under an Israeli government policy defining Palestinians below the age of 16 in the West Bank or Gaza as minors, while Israeli youths in the same Occupied Territories are considered minors until they reach the age of 18.¹

Palestinian children living in East Jerusalem who were suspected of an "Intifada Criminal Offence" such as stone-throwing were often arrested at home in the middle of the night and subjected to interrogation inappropriate to their age and physical or mental state.² Such interrogations have reportedly included children being blindfolded, bound and beaten.³

Non state armed groups

There was no evidence that the Palestinian Authority (PA) recruited or used child soldiers. In May 2002, the PA addressed the United Nations Special Session on Children and advocated the application of the CRC-OP-CAC, which prohibits the use in hostilities of those under the age of eighteen.⁴ In 2002, the PA also reaffirmed its commitment to the Coalition not to use children in hostilities in a private communication.⁵

In its November 2002 *1379 Report*, the Coalition recommended UN monitoring of three armed opposition groups, *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades* (Hamas), *Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades* (Fatah) and *Islamic Jihad* to determine whether children were being recruited or used as soldiers.

Two 17-year-old boys from the Askar refugee camp in Nablus detonated bombs on their person in two separate attacks on 12 August 2003, killing an Israeli soldier and a civilian.⁶ *Hamas'* armed wing, the Qassam Brigades, claimed responsibility for providing the explosives for suicide bomber Khamis Ghazi Gerwan.⁷ *Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades* claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing by Islam Qteishat, whose mother later demanded retribution against whoever sent her son to his death.⁸

During 2002, both *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* disavowed the use of children after under-18s were involved in suicide bombings and armed attacks on Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip. A *Hamas* statement in April 2002 called on mosque imams "to give this issue some mention in their sermons" and on educators "to dedicate time to address this issue without sacrificing the enthusiasm or spirit of martyrdom of our youth [*ashbaluna*]."⁹ An

Islamic Jihad communiqué of April 26, citing Islamic strictures against the participation of children in war, declared: “We refuse any encouragement given to young people that might drive them to act alone or be pushed by others into action. They are not ready and not able to do so.”¹⁰

Recommendations

- The UN should monitor *Qassam Brigades*, (*Hamas*), *Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades* (*Fatah*) and *Islamic Jihad* to determine whether recruitment and use of children is taking place.
- The Israeli government should withdraw the interpretive declaration made on its signature of the CRC-OP-CAC and declare its commitment to a ‘straight-18’ standard for recruitment
- The Israeli government should revise military and criminal code provisions regarding children who take part in hostilities, or who are arrested or detained, to uphold international standards of juvenile justice
- The Palestinian Authority should reiterate calls upon all Palestinian armed groups and individuals not to encourage children to participate in acts of violence.
- The Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority should establish mechanisms to implement provisions of the CRC-OP-CAC, including child demobilization and reintegration, and to monitor its implementation.

¹ Los Angeles Times, “Israel’s Detention of Palestinian Minors Criticized”, 17 August 2003.

² Submission by the law offices of Usama Halabi on behalf of Defence of Children International – Israel to Israeli Minister of Internal Security and Ministry of Justice Legal Advisor, February 28, 2003.

³ Los Angeles Times, “Israel’s Detention of Palestinian Minors Criticized”, 17 August 2003.

⁴ Statement of Dr. Emile Jarjou’i, Head of Delegation of the Observer Delegation of Palestine on the occasion of the Special Session of the General Assembly on Children, May 9, 2002 cited in HRW, “Erased in a Moment”, October 2002.

⁵ Facsimile to the Coalition from Dr Ahmed Al-Yaziji, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sports and General Secretary, Palestinian High Council for Motherhood and Childhood, 7 July 2002.

⁶ New York Times, “2 Suicide Bombers Fulfilled Their Fathers’ Worst Nightmares”, 14 August 2003 and Agence France Presse, “Hamas says still committed to truce”, 13 August 2003.

⁷ Voice of America, “Hamas Claims Responsibility for 1 of 2 Suicide Bombings Against Israeli Targets”, 12 August 2003.

⁸ Associated Press, “Two blasts shake Mid-east truce: A pair of 17-year-old Palestinians kill two Israelis”, 13 August 2003.

⁹ Access to this source at http://www.qassam.org/hamas/bayanat/24_04_2002 is currently blocked. Cited in HRW, “Erased in a Moment”, October 2002.

¹⁰ Islamic Jihad communiqué, “Protect our children from being killed,” April 26, 2002. Translated by UNICEF, Jerusalem. Cited in HRW, “Erased in a Moment”, October 2002.

LIBERIA

Government forces

Reports indicated that the Armed Forces of Liberia continued to recruit children, both forcibly and voluntarily, in Monrovia and government-controlled areas. Charles Ghankay Taylor stepped down as Liberia's president on 11 August 2003. Taylor had come under intense pressure after being indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in June 2003 for his alleged role in crimes committed during the 10-year civil war in Sierra Leone, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. It is widely known that ex-President Taylor supported the United Revolutionary Front (RUF), which abducted and forcibly recruited children as soldiers in Sierra Leone.¹

The conflict in Liberia intensified in the immediate months prior to Charles Taylor's resignation. Reports indicated increased voluntary and forcible recruitment of child soldiers in Monrovia and government-controlled areas.² On 22 July UNICEF, the United Nation's (UN) Special Representative for West Africa, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict and ECOWAS issued a joint urgent appeal for an end to hostilities and emphasized the "unacceptable mobilisation of children and women in violation of all agreed international norms and standards". The appeal went on to state that "some of the actions against children and women constitute crimes of war under the statute of the International Criminal Court".³ UNICEF and the NGO Don Bosco also publicly denounced the forcible and voluntary recruitment of girls and boys as young as nine years into Liberian government armed forces.⁴

Relief workers reported raids on schools and displaced people's camps, including an attempt to press gang school children into joining the armed forces in the northern town of Ganta on 6 March 2003, which sparked off protest riots.⁵ International NGOs estimated that at least one in ten children in Montserrado displacement camps were recruited by Government forces.⁶ As some children testified: "We the children are still being forcefully recruited from the camp. There are incidences of young boys who put up resistance and who were flogged and forcefully recruited".⁷ Child soldiers seeking refuge in Sierra Leone reported being forcibly recruited by the government's Anti-Terrorist Unit and armed forces.⁸ Young male conscripts were forced to carry looted goods and captured weapons and sent to the front, often without proper training.⁹

Children attempting to flee with their parents towards the border with Sierra Leone were stopped at checkpoints by the Anti-Terrorist Unit. The children were taken away from their parents to a military base, where their heads were shaved. Those children whose parents couldn't afford to "buy" their freedom were sent to the front lines, often with little or no training.¹⁰

In June 2003, the Liberian Defence Minister, Daniel Chea, denied that the government was forcibly conscripting children, arguing that young people were patriotically volunteering.¹¹ However, women representing the internally displaced who demonstrated in Monrovia in April 2003 recounted an increase in forcible conscription of boys and young men, with government security forces shooting randomly as those abducted tried to flee.¹²

Non-state armed groups

The opposition Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a group allegedly backed by Sierra Leone, Guinea and the US, continued to recruit and use children. Human Rights Watch reported that children were recruited, sometimes forcibly, and used in offensives and to porter arms, ammunition and other supplies in Liberia's northern Lofa country, where LURD bases are situated.¹³ During a June 2003 LURD attack on Gbarnga, eyewitnesses reported children firing rocket-propelled grenades as well as automatic assault rifles.¹⁴ Liberian children seeking refuge in Sierra Leone also reported forced recruitment by the LURD.¹⁵ On 30 June 2003, the LURD reportedly issued a statement pledging that it would no longer use child soldiers: "Military commanders are herein strictly instructed to release/discharge any military personnel under the age of eighteen."¹⁶

The Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) also reportedly recruits and uses child soldiers.¹⁷ Human Rights Watch documented cases of recruitment of Liberian and Ivorian children in Cote d'Ivoire by MODEL, to fight in Liberia.¹⁸ The UN Panel of Experts on Liberia specifically referred to forcible recruitment of Liberian refugees, including children, in Côte d'Ivoire by Liberian armed opposition groups.¹⁹ Most of the Liberian child mercenaries fighting on the side of the Côte d'Ivoire government forces in the neighbouring conflict belonged to MODEL and LURD.²⁰

On 18 August 2003 MODEL, LURD and the Liberian government signed a peace agreement. However, according to the UN, the risk of child soldiers being re-mobilized or new children being recruited by government forces or armed opposition groups remained high as the situation was still extremely volatile.²¹

Demobilization and child protection programs

A representative of the UN Program for the Coordination of Assistance for Security stated that many programs to disarm and demobilize child fighters and reintegrate them into civilian life had been "badly managed".²² There had been few coordinated efforts by UN agencies on prevention or disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs for the thousands of child soldiers participating in the conflict. Many demobilized or escaped child soldiers from Liberia were in refugee camps in Sierra Leone and Guinea. While some were benefiting from child protection programs, many more were at risk of re-recruitment by armed forces and groups fighting in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.²³

Days after the signature of the peace agreement, child soldiers reportedly began to spontaneously surrender their weapons. On 23 August 2003, 80 ex-child-soldiers who had been fighting in the ranks of either government or opposition forces were under the care of the UN in Monrovia. However, according to UNICEF no official demobilization process had been launched because of the reluctance of commanders and authorities of the different forces to cooperate. They officially denied the existence of child soldiers within their ranks. There were reports of military officials forcing child soldiers under their command to conceal their real age.²⁴

The process of DDR of child soldiers remained a major challenge in a country where, according to UN estimates, nearly 80 per cent of those who have fought in the civil war

since 1999 were children.²⁵ The UN requested \$25 million from the European Union for the process.²⁶

Recommendations

- The UN should urge the new Liberian government to take immediate effective steps to end the recruitment and use of children into government forces.
- The UN should urge the new Liberian government to take immediate steps to ensure that children in displacement camps are afforded effective protection from recruitment.
- The UN should urge the new Liberian Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict and demonstrate its commitment to a “straight-18” standard for recruitment into all the armed forces.
- The UN should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Liberia, urging them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- In any talks with armed opposition groups the Government should ensure that specific needs of child soldiers are taken into account. Any peace agreement should also include provisions to bring to justice those responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including recruitment and use of child soldiers.

¹ Charles Taylor accepted safe haven in Nigeria.

² IRIN, “Liberia: Child Soldiers are back on the Frontline”, 9 June 2003; Guardian, “Liberia’s Child Soldiers Play War Games With Real Bullets”, 20 June 2003; UNICEF, “An interview with an ex-child soldier in Liberia: The former ‘Captain War Boss’”, 11 June 2003; Information from Amnesty International, June 2003.

³ UNICEF press statement, 22 July 2003, <http://www.unicef.org/media>

⁴ IRIN, “Liberia: UNICEF calls for end of atrocities against children”, 22 April 2003.

⁵ IRIN, “Liberia: Child Soldiers are back on the Frontline”, 9 June 2003.

⁶ Information received from Save the Children, 30 June 2003.

⁷ Garpeh, Eva & Miatta Abdullai, Draft Briefing note of Meeting with Children’s Clubs in Ricks and Wilson Corner Displacement camps, 1 March 2003, quoted by Save the Children in correspondence to the Coalition, 30 June 2003.

⁸ Save the Children-UK, Information obtained from interviews with child refugees in Sierra Leone, March - April, 2003.

⁹ Human Rights Watch, HRW Letter to the UN Security Council Regarding the Mano River Union, 17 July 2002.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, HRW Letter to the UN Security Council Regarding the Mano River Union, 17 July 2002.

¹¹ BBC, “Former Child Soldiers Said to be back on Front Lines”, 23 March 2003.

¹² Kwanue, C.Y., “Schools, Businesses Closed in Nimba, As Citizens Protests Conscription”, *The Inquirer*, February 27, 2003, Vo. 13, No. 28; information corroborated by Amnesty International, June 2003.

¹³ Information received from Human Rights Watch, July 2003.

¹⁴ IRIN, “Liberia: Child Soldiers are back on the Frontline”, 9 June 2003.

¹⁵ Save the Children-UK, Information obtained from interviews with child refugees in Sierra Leone, March - April, 2003.

¹⁶ AFP, “Liberian rebels to stop using child fighters: communiqué”, 30 June 2003.

¹⁷ International Organisation for Migration, “Côte d’Ivoire – Des pluies torrentielles retardent l’évacuation des ressortissants de pays tiers,” *Notes pour la presse*, 13 June 2003.

¹⁸ HRW, “Trapped Between Two Wars: Violence Against Civilians in Western Côte d’Ivoire”, August 2003.

¹⁹ UN Panel of Experts on Liberia, S/2003/498, 24 April 2003.

²⁰ HRW, “Trapped between two wars: violence against civilians in western Côte d’Ivoire”. August 2003.

²¹ AFP, “Les enfants soldats libériens ont commence a déposer les armes (UNICEF)”, 23 August 2003.

²² IRIN, “Liberia: Child Soldiers are back on the Frontline”, 9 June 2003.

²³ Information received from Save the Children, 17 March 2003.

²⁴ AFP, “Les enfants soldats libériens ont commence a déposer les armes (UNICEF)”, 23 August 2003.

²⁵ AFP, “Les enfants soldats libériens ont commence a déposer les armes (UNICEF)”, 23 August 2003.

²⁶ AFP, “Le représentant de l’ONU souhaite un gouvernement de technocrates au Liberia”, 17 August 2003.

MYANMAR (BURMA)

Government armed forces

The Burmese army, the *Tatmadaw*, continued to recruit large numbers of child soldiers, despite government statements to the contrary.¹ Human Rights Watch estimated that children may account for 35 to 45 percent of new recruits into the national army, and 70,000 or more of Myanmar's estimated 350,000 soldiers.² Children, some as young as eleven, were forcibly recruited, brutally treated during training, used in forced labour by the army and forced to participate in armed conflict. Children were also used to commit human rights abuses against civilians and other child recruits.³

In 2002 the ruling body, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) claimed that the army was comprised entirely of volunteers aged eighteen and older. In May 2002, the Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the UN stated that: "the Government prohibits the enlisting of recruits under the lawful age [of 18 years]. The under age are not allowed to apply for recruitment. Action is taken on any infringement of the Regulation under the Defence Services Act."⁴

In January 2003 *The Washington Post* conducted an investigation along the Thai-Burma border and interviewed several former soldiers recruited as children.⁵ Reports emerged of children being kidnapped by soldiers while on their way home from school, at ports, bus terminals, and train stations.⁶ In June 2003, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) reported recruitment of children as young as eleven or twelve, based on eyewitness accounts by refugees in Northern Thailand.⁷

A 14-year-old boy interviewed in April 2003 recounted being abducted when aged 13 while on his way to school in August 2002 in Yangon (Rangoon). He said the soldiers forced him into a military vehicle and threatened to shoot him if he tried to escape. After being taken to a military camp, he said that "other trainees, if they were caught trying to run away, their hands and feet were beaten with a bamboo stick, and then put in shackles and beaten and poked again and again, and then they were taken to the lock-up".⁸

Similar findings were reported by Human Rights Watch in 2002.⁹ They found that new recruits were typically sent to one of two large recruitment holding centres near Yangon and Mandalay. Reports by former soldiers sent to the centres over the past four years indicated that approximately 35 to 45 per cent of new recruits were under the age of eighteen and 15 to 20 per cent were under the age of fifteen. The youngest recruits were between eleven and thirteen. New recruits were generally not allowed to contact their families, and children reported harsh treatment during training, including frequent beatings and brutal punishments for attempted escapes. Duties performed reportedly included preparing meals to fighting in front line areas and committing human rights abuses, including rounding up villagers for forced labour, burning homes and villages and carrying out extra-judicial executions.¹⁰

Non-state armed groups

Human Rights Watch found that nearly all armed groups in Myanmar recruited and used child soldiers. According to some estimates the combined non-state armies contain between six and seven thousand soldiers under the age of eighteen.¹¹ The United Wa

State Army (UWSA), which agreed a ceasefire with the authorities in 1989, was estimated to have 2,000 child soldiers, often conscripted by force. The Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) worked with the support of the Burma Army and SPDC authorities and regularly engaged in skirmishes with the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA).¹² It was unclear whether the DKBA had a policy on the minimum age for recruitment to the army. One former DKBA soldier interviewed by Human Rights Watch believed that 40 to 50 percent of new recruits to the DKBA were under eighteen. The Kachin Independence Army (KIA), another ceasefire group, also forcibly recruited children, including girls, who were used for labouring on roads and farms. Although it claimed not to have any child soldiers, witnesses reported that some children served in support roles.¹³ The Mon National Liberation Army, the armed wing of the New Mon State Party, which agreed a ceasefire with the authorities in 1995, was also reported to use child soldiers.¹⁴ The Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the armed wing of the Karen National Union in conflict with the authorities for more than 50 years, set eighteen as the minimum age of recruitment, but was known to accept children who actively sought to enlist, and allowed them to participate in combat. The KNLA was estimated to have up to 500 child soldiers.¹⁵

Representatives of the Karenni Army (KnA), the armed wing of the Karenni National Progressive Party, told HRW in 2002 that it had had over 3,000 names on its enlistment rolls but due to a lack of resources there were only 1,200 armed and active soldiers. Other estimates placed KnA strength at approximately 1,000 soldiers, with possibly an additional 500 militiamen.¹⁶ While KnA policy specified the minimum recruitment age as eighteen, KnA officials openly admitted that the rules were often broken. In March 2002, a KnA general told HRW that an estimated 20 per cent of the soldiers in his army were under 18 years old, suggesting a total figure of about 250 child soldiers. Other sources provided similar estimates.¹⁷ All the KnA soldiers interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2002 testified that they had volunteered for service, with several under-16s saying they volunteered because their houses had been burned down.¹⁸

International developments

In April 2003 the United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights adopted by consensus resolution 2003/12 which deplored continuing human rights violations in Myanmar, including the “systematic use of child soldiers”, and called on the government to take immediate action to end the use of forced labour, including by the armed forces.¹⁹

The International Labour Organization (ILO) opened a liaison office in Yangon in June 2002 and in September appointed a Permanent Liaison Officer. In May 2003 the ILO said that an agreement had been reached between the ILO and the SPDC to appoint an independent ILO facilitator with a mandate to receive complaints on forced labour. However, the ILO postponed signing the agreement following the deterioration of the human rights situation and the mass arrests of political activists at the end of May. Concern was widely expressed that the facilitator’s capacity to receive complaints would be seriously impaired in the prevailing climate of fear and intimidation.²⁰

Demobilization and child protection programs

There were no disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs available for child soldiers in Myanmar or neighbouring countries. Children suspected of desertion were subjected to beatings, long prison terms, forced re-recruitment, or in some cases, summary execution.

Recommendations

- The UN Security Council should treat the continued recruitment and use of child soldiers in Myanmar as a matter of high priority; and should consider taking appropriate steps to ensure that such recruitment and use is halted.
- The Myanmar government should take immediate steps to end the forced and voluntary recruitment of children into the armed forces.
- The government should establish dialogue with all ceasefire groups aimed at the demobilization of child soldiers and an end to their recruitment and use.
- The government should permit either UN observers, or independent human rights monitors to visit Myanmar and observe recruitment practices within the armed forces.
- The government should begin a dialogue with UNICEF and other appropriate UN agencies to establish DDR programs for child soldiers from both government and opposition forces.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth.
- The government should ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict and declare a commitment to a “straight-18” standard for recruitment.

¹ UNICEF, *Adult Wars, Child Soldiers* (New York, UNICEF, 2002).

² Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002.

³ Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002; Democratic Voice of Burma News, 2 July 2003.

⁴ Letter to HRW from the Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the UN, May 8, 2002.

⁵ Nakashima, Ellen, “Burma’s Child Soldiers Tell of Army Atrocities,” *Washington Post*, February 10, 2003.

⁶ Democratic Voice of Burma News, 22 January 2003. See also, Wilkinson, Ray, “Growing pains,” *Bangkok Post*, 19 June 2003; Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, Vo. 2, No. 22, “Child Soldiers Flee to Freedom,” 28 May 2003.

⁷ International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, *Trade Union World Briefing*, June 2003, p. 5.

⁸ Information received confidentially by credible Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers sources in August 2003.

⁹ Information provided by HRW, July 2002.

¹⁰ Information provided by HRW, July 2002

¹¹ Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002.

¹² Pathan, D, “New Rebel recruits train to face Burmese Army”, *The Asian Age*, 3 February 1999.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002.

¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002.

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch, *My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma*, October 2002.

¹⁶ Information provided by HRW, July 2002.

¹⁷ Information provided by HRW, July 2002

¹⁸ Information provided by HRW, July 2002

¹⁹ Resolution 2003/12 on the Situation of Human Rights in Myanmar, 59th Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, 17 March-25 April 2003

²⁰ Amnesty International 2003, *Myanmar: Justice on trial* (ASA 16/019/2003)

NEPAL

Government forces

There were no indications of a policy of, or systematic recruitment below the age of 18 into the Royal Nepal Army (RNA). However, the government reportedly targeted children suspected of affiliation with the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN-Maoist).¹ Many children, some as young as 13, were taken into custody by security forces in connection with the insurgency and some remained unaccounted for.² Some children were reportedly used as by government forces as informers. Children were also victims of the armed conflict through exposure to war remnants and explosives, or by being caught in crossfire.³

Non-state armed groups

The CPN disengaged from peace talks with the government on 27 August and the conflict resumed. There were reports of CPN recruitment and use of children aged between 15 and 18, although the CPN leadership denied this.⁴ Many children were reportedly abducted by the CPN, including 518 children in January 2003. Most were released after a few days after having taken part in political indoctrination courses.⁵ Eighty children aged around 15 were reportedly abducted from Jan Jyoti school, Salyan district in Western Nepal in January. They said they had received training in “guerrilla warfare” before being released.⁶ Child recruits were reportedly used in some cases as fighters and human shields, as well as messengers and porters.⁷ Some underage girls reported sexual abuse while with the group.⁸

The CPN sponsored the All Nepal National Independent Students’ Union (Revolutionary) (ANNISU-R), a student political organization, which clashed with armed forces on various occasions.⁹ In the ANNISU-R was accused of forcible recruitment at schools using threats to intimidate students, head teachers, and other relevant actors into boosting their ranks.¹⁰ In June a member of the ANNISU-R claimed that the organization numbered as many as 400,000.¹¹

Demobilization and child protection programs

No official child DDR program existed, although some small projects had been established for former combatants.¹² One regional NGO noted that “children’s advocates express concern that these efforts [at reintegrating children affected by the insurgency] by both the government and other organizations may be catering to less than half of the children actually affected by the conflict.”¹³ While some child soldiers reportedly returned home after the ceasefire declared on 29 January 2003, they were not officially demobilized. At the time, these children expressed concern they could be re-recruited if the conflict resumed and such fears re-emerged after the breakdown of negotiations in August.¹⁴

Recommendations

- The United Nations (UN) should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Nepal, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.

- UNICEF and other appropriate UN agencies should work with the government of Nepal and neighbouring states to establish rehabilitation and reintegration programs for child soldiers from both government and opposition forces.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies and partners should devote resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers.

¹ The State of the Rights of the Child in Nepal 2003, National Report by Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center, 2003.

² "Security agencies fail to reveal whereabouts of arrested children," The Kathmandu Post, 15 April 2003.

³ Information received by credible CSC sources, September 2003.

⁴ "Maoist leader denies recruiting child soldiers," Himalayan News Service, 11 May 2003; "Maoists deny charges of using child soldiers," The Kathmandu Post, 20 April 2003.

⁵ Mills, Elizabeth, "Nepal – Maoists Kidnap More Students as Political Battles Continue in Nepal," *World Market Research Center Daily Analysis*, 14 January 2003; "Rights-Nepal: As Violence Rises, Children Roped into Maoist War," *Inter Press Service*, 17 January 2003; Child workers in Nepal Concerned Centre (CWIN) update, June 2003, www.cwin.nepal.org

⁶ "Nepal insurgents abduct 80 students for indoctrination," *Kathmandu Post* via Nepalnews.com website in English, 14 January 2003..

⁷ "UN envoy to Nepal comments on Maoist recruitment of children," BBC Monitoring South Asia, 16 January 2003; "Nepal concerned over recruitment of child soldiers by Maoists," The Press Trust of India Limited, 16 January 2003.

⁸ The State of the Rights of the Child in Nepal 2003, National Report by Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center, 2003.

⁹ "ANNISU-R demands dismissal of all charges against its cadres," The Kathmandu Post, 20 March 2003; "Student strike badly affects life in Kathmandu, 54 students arrested [Corrected 04/28/03]," Agence France-Presse, 28 April 2003.

"Nepalese army rejects allegations of human rights violations," BBC Monitoring South Asia, 27 December 2002.

¹⁰ "Nepal Maoists accused of forcing students to join ranks," BBC Monitoring South Asia, 20 June 2003.

¹¹ Nepal Maoists accused of forcing students to join ranks," BBC Monitoring South Asia, 20 June 2003.

¹² The State of the Rights of the Child in Nepal 2003, National Report by Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Center, 2003.

¹³ Citing *The Kathmandu Post*: "Nepal: Government Efforts for Child Victims of Insurgency may be Insufficient," Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, 2 April 2003.

¹⁴ "Child soldiers wish for peace, do not want to return to jungle," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2 May 2003.

PHILIPPINES

Government forces

The Philippines government ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC-OP-CAC) on 26 August 2003. There were no indications of Philippine armed forces formally recruiting soldiers below the age of 18, although there have been reports of government-backed paramilitary groups recruiting children for military training. Children, including possible child soldiers, have been killed during military operations to crush opposition forces, particularly members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).¹ In March the Social Welfare minister urged government forces to rescue child soldiers rather than engage them in battle.²

In August President Gloria Arroyo said the government was set to resume “exploratory” peace negotiations with the National Democratic Front (NDF), the political wing of the armed opposition group the New People’s Army (NPA).³ Talks had been indefinitely suspended in March.⁴ Peace talks between the government and the MILF were set to resume in the southern island of Mindanao in September 2003.⁵

Non-state armed groups

According to government forces, the testimonies of former NPA members revealed “...massive recruitment of minors aged 13 to 17 from the ranks of urban students and out-of-school peasants”. In January 2003, an NPA spokesperson rebutted this allegation, saying that “[t]he military is again peddling lies. What we follow is a strong and clear-cut policy that prohibits any NPA unit to recruit combatants that are below 18 years old”. He said that in cases where minors do wish to join the NPA, “they are not given guns and are not assigned tasks that directly involve combat operations.” According to the spokesperson “[m]ost of them perform menial assignments, running errands, courier jobs and the likes.”⁶ A 16-year old child arrested by the military reportedly served as tax collector for the NPA.⁷

However, government forces continued to report the recruitment and training of children by the NPA in several areas in the country.⁸ Several students were among the NPA members involved in encounters with government forces. Military forces claimed that the presence of minors in the NPA was part of a program to expose them to the countryside.⁹ Among those captured by the military during encounters were 16-year-old children.¹⁰

The use of children by the MILF continued to be reported. In May 2003, alleged child MILF members (aged between 14 to 15) were among those killed in several clashes between the military and MILF.¹¹ In the same month, the Department of Social Welfare and Development noted that half the 98 MILF members who surrendered with the government were teenagers.¹² MILF members captured by government forces have included children as young as 11 years of age.¹³ The military also reported finding photos of children in uniform and carrying firearms in an MILF camp.¹⁴

Demobilization and child protection programs

A study grant program was being undertaken by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and the Commission on Higher Education. The program was open to qualified former members of the NPA, MILF and the Moro National Liberation Front. The United States government agreed to support the peace efforts of the Philippine government by providing \$30 million to finance livelihood projects for MILF members once a peace accord had been signed.¹⁵

Recommendations

- The government should ensure strict implementation of the OP-CRC -CAC and should declare their commitment to it and to establishing a “straight 18” standard for recruitment.
- The United Nations (UN) should increase its dialogue between the various groups involved in armed conflict and the Philippine government, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children as combatants.
- UNICEF and other UN agencies should work with the government to establish disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs for child combatants, and make special provision to ensure that children involved in armed opposition groups have access to the programs.
- The UN should urge the government to include the issue of child soldiers in peace talks with opposition groups the issue on the use of child soldiers.
- UN agencies and NGOs should monitor the former child soldiers under the custody of the military and follow-up the situation of children already released to the Social Welfare and Development ministry or their families.

¹ *Philippine Daily Inquirer* news service, 2 January 2003.

² *Philippine Daily Inquirer* news service 22 May 2003.

³ “Peace talks with communist rebels to resume soon, *Agence France Press*, 13 August 2003.

⁴ Update Report on the GRP-NDF Peace Talks from GRP Peace Panel, 6 March 2003.

⁵ “Philippines holds talks this week on Muslim revolt”, Reuters Foundation, 3 September 2003.

⁶ Mallari, Jr., Delfin T., “NPA assailed on child warriors,” *Inquirer News Service*, 4 January, 2003.

⁷ Zonio, Aquiles, “Army seeks amnesty for minor rebel,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 January 2003.

⁸ Palangchao, Harley and Picana, Thom S., “Rebs training new recruits in Nueva Vizcaya,” *The Manila Times*, 5 February 2003.

⁹ Bayoran, Gilbert, “NPA still recruiting minors,” *The Visayan Daily Star* (electronic version), 29 March 2003, <http://www.visayandailystar.com/2003/March/29/topstory5.htm>

¹⁰ Zonio, Aquiles, “Army captures another teen NPA rebel after clash,” *Inquirer News Service*, 21 January 2003; Zonio, Aquiles, “Army seeks amnesty for minor rebel,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 22 January 2003.

¹¹ Fernandez, Edwin, et al., “Military says MILF terror plan uncovered,” *Inquirer News Service*, 21 May 2003.

¹² Alipala, Julie S. and Maningo, Jeffrey P., “Don’t steal the childhood of our youth,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 24 May 2003.

¹³ *Philippine Army*, “MILF children rebels captured in Maguindanao,” Press Release 103-03, 2 June 2003.

¹⁴ Alipala, Julie S., “Military urged to rescue child-soldiers,” *Inquirer News Service*, 18 February 2003.

¹⁵ Reuter, “Philippine government hurries MILF Peace Talks”, 30 July 2003.

www.armedgroups.org/breaking/news/0730phi.htm

RWANDA

Government forces

Reports indicated that the practice of recruiting children as young as 15 into the Rwandese Defence Forces had stopped, although some children remained in the army. While the Rwandese government argued that these children worked as servants, some had an army number indicating that they were soldiers.¹ Children, some as young as 14, were still reportedly recruited into Local Defence Forces (LDF), government-organized militias, which patrolled their home areas without pay after receiving arms and brief training.² LDF assisted the Rwandese Army in skirmishes with armed opposition groups in Rwanda and the DRC.³ Despite national legislation prohibiting recruitment under 18, local officials regularly called up youth, including under-18s.⁴ With rising tensions between Uganda and Rwanda, LDF recruitment drives increased, heightening the risk of under-age recruitment.⁵

In 2002 Rwandese involvement in the continued recruitment of children in eastern Congo was highlighted by the large number of children in demobilization centres who spoke only Kinyarwanda.⁶ The armed wing of the *Rassemblement congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma* (RCD-Goma), supported by the government of Rwanda, confirmed to a United Nations (UN) officer in early 2003 that it had been recruiting children into its ranks.⁷ According to the same source, the RCD-Goma led campaigns, including in local schools, to encourage enlistment by children and youth from January 2003.⁸ The RCD-Goma actively recruited demobilized child soldiers formerly with the *Mai-Mai*.⁹ Many RCD-Goma commanders and authorities used child soldiers as their personal guards. Reliable reports indicated that the splinter groups *RCD-National* and *RCD-Kisangani-Mouvement de libération* also continued to recruit and use children, with recent reports indicating that 20 to 25 per cent of the troops are children.¹⁰ The *Mudundu 40*, backed by the Government of Rwanda, was composed of up to 40 per cent child soldiers, according to credible sources.¹¹

Thousands of Rwandese children accused of participation in the genocide were held in detention until their release on bail in January 2003. Under the Rwandan criminal code children below the age of 14 at the time the crime was committed cannot be held legally responsible for their actions. However, many under 14s were held in detention following the genocide.¹² Children in local detention centres (*cachots*) were often subjected to ill treatment and not segregated from adults.¹³

In the *gacaca* process (community-based system of justice) still underway, youths who were between 14 and 18 at the time the crimes were committed received half the sentence imposed on adults. Many of these detainees should have been subject to immediate and unconditional release since they had already served eight or more years, more than half the maximum 15-year sentence for adults convicted of lesser crimes during the genocide. There were some concerns that the *gacaca* process did not comply with international juvenile justice standards embodied in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Non-state armed groups

Rwandese armed opposition groups operating in the DRC reportedly continued to recruit and use children there. These groups included the former *Forces armées rwandaises*

(ex-FAR) and Rwandese interhamwe.¹⁴ It was difficult to determine the numbers of children in armed groups, particularly as not many children returned to Rwanda after refugee camps in Eastern Zaire (now DRC) were dismantled in late 1996. Since 1998, Hutu militias reportedly targeted children in north-western Rwanda for recruitment.¹⁵ Some children were forcibly recruited by armed groups; others joined 'voluntarily' because they had no family or financial support. Their ages varied between 11 and 14 years. When first recruited they were mostly used as porters, spies or cooks. After brief training they become active soldiers.¹⁶

Demobilization and child protection programs

Several hundred children captured in skirmishes against armed opposition groups were demobilized and reintegrated through the Multi Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP). In June 2003, reports indicated that due to the recent withdrawal of Rwandese troops from the DRC, more than 2000 child soldiers could be returning to Rwanda.¹⁷ Some children said they would not claim the benefits of returnees, fearing that their identification as former child soldiers would provoke retribution within their communities. The precarious socio-economic situation in Rwanda increased the risks of children being re-recruited by armed groups in other countries, or given hazardous jobs as a means to support their families. This was particularly problematic in the context of judicial processes underway for people accused of genocide, many of whom left their children in charge of households while in detention.¹⁸

An evaluation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program by Save the Children-UK in 2003 highlighted the following shortcomings: 1) children stayed too long in the solidarity centre before moving to a rehabilitation centre; 2) children's medical needs were not adequately addressed; 3) children were not actively involved in the process; 4) children did not receive the same reintegration support packages as adults; 5) there was insufficient co-ordination between key governmental bodies involved in DDR; and 6) children were not segregated from adults at the solidarity centre.¹⁹

Very few girls had undergone formal processes for demobilization, highlighting gender issues which should be addressed by the DDR program.²⁰

Recommendations

- The UN should exercise its influence on the Rwandese Government to take immediate steps to end the recruitment and use of children as soldiers in Rwanda.
- The UN must urge the Rwandese Government to take steps to stop the use of child soldiers in DRC by the Rwandese Government backed RCD-Goma and the splinter groups RCD-National, RCD-Kisangani/Mouvement de liberation and Mudundu 40.
- The UN should increase its dialogue with opposition forces, urging them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- The UN should take steps to decrease the flow of small arms to Rwanda, and via Rwanda to the DRC, which is fuelling the conflict and facilitating the use of child soldiers.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.

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- ¹ Information received from Amnesty International, 27 June 2003.
 - ² Human Rights Watch, Annual Report, 2001.
 - ³ Human Rights Watch, "Lasting Wounds: Consequences of Genocide and War on Rwanda's Children", March 2003; Information received from Amnesty International, 27 June 2003.
 - ⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Lasting Wounds: Consequences of Genocide and War on Rwanda's Children", March 2003.
 - ⁵ Information received from Amnesty International, 27 June 2003; Human Rights Watch, "Lasting Wounds: Consequences of Genocide and War on Rwanda's Children", March 2003.
 - ⁶ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition) interviews, Goma, 18 June 2002.
 - ⁷ Confidential report from UN officer, 27 March 2003.
 - ⁸ Confidential report from UN officer, 27 March 2003; Reports from Coalition members
 - ⁹ Information received from credible Coalition sources, 2 February 2003.
 - ¹⁰ Information received from Coalition members, June 2003.
 - ¹¹ GRAM, Press Release, 21 April 2003; Confidential report from UN officer, 29 April 2003.
 - ¹² US State Department, Human Rights Report, 2000.
 - ¹³ Information supplied by Amnesty international; Matloff, J., "Rwanda's bind: trying children for genocide", Christian Science Monitor, 28/1/97.
 - ¹⁴ Information received from Coalition members in Burundi and DRC, March 2003 and June 2003.
 - ¹⁵ SC-Sweden, Children of War, 03/01.
 - ¹⁶ Gervais Abayeho, Coalition, 1999.
 - ¹⁷ Information received from Save the Children, 12 June 2003.
 - ¹⁸ Information received from Save the Children, 12 June 2003.
 - ¹⁹ Information received from Save the Children, 30 June 2003, based on unpublished evaluation.
 - ²⁰ Information received from Save the Children and Amnesty International, June 2003.

SIERRA LEONE

Government forces

There were no indications of child soldiers in government armed forces.

Non-state armed groups

Former combatants from armed opposition groups, including some children and known child recruiters, were actively involved in recent conflicts in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia.¹ The Special Court in Sierra Leone indicted several former leaders of armed opposition groups for conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 years into their groups or using them to participate in hostilities. Observers stated that the indictments provided a positive precedent to ending a culture of impunity.² Foday Sankoh, a former leader of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) died of natural causes on 30 July 2003. He was being tried by the Special Court together with three of his top commanders for war crimes, including conscription of children into the armed opposition group.³

Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia was indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone on 4 June, for "bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes", including the conscription or enlistment of children under 15 years of age while backing the RUF during the civil war.⁴ After being forced to step down as president of Liberia he fled to Nigeria where he was believed to remain.

Demobilization and child protection programs

During a trip to West Africa in February 2003, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict applauded disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) efforts by child protection agencies.⁵ However, Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF, said in a statement made in July 2003 that UNICEF's program to reintegrate more than 7,000 children who fought in the civil war was threatened by a shortfall in international funding. The UN agency estimated that 1.4 million dollars were needed immediately and another 2.5 million dollars in the near future to complete the program.⁶

Some organizations, such as the Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC), expressed concerns about children's DDR programs in Sierra Leone, highlighting gaps in the process, particularly regarding the needs of girls and former child soldiers from the RUF.⁷ It was estimated that hundreds of girl children associated with the fighting forces in the Sierra Leone conflict remained with their former commanders.

The use of between 2,000 and 3,000 former child soldiers of ages ranging between 10 and 15 as diamond miners in northern and eastern parts of Sierra Leone represented another area of concern. These children were rarely paid more than 50 cents a day and working conditions were extremely harsh.⁸

Some former child soldiers displaced to refugee camps in Guinea were reluctant to repatriate to Sierra Leone, fearing revenge attacks because they were known to communities and had not gone through DDR processes.⁹

Recommendations

- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority or are currently displaced, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- DDR programs should also follow up on demobilized children at risk of being exploited as cheap labour.
- UN agencies working with displaced, separated or other vulnerable Sierra Leone children should take specific measures to protect them from possible recruitment into armed forces and groups at conflict in the region, with particular attention paid to border and refugee communities.
- The UN should encourage member states to support, financially and politically, the work of the Special Court, to enable it to carry out its mandate.

¹ HRW, "Regional Crisis and Human Rights Abuses in West Africa", 20 June 2003.

² IRIN, 19 March 2003.

³ AFP, "Sierra Leone ex-rebel leader Foday Sankoh dies", 30 July 2003.

⁴ AFP, "Liberian president charged with war crimes by Sierra Leone court", 4 June 2003.

⁵ UN, Press Release, 24 February 2003.

⁶ AFP, "Plight of child soldiers in Sierra Leone neglected: UN", 22 July 2003.

⁷ WCRWC, Letter to Mr Olara Otunnu, February 2003.

⁸ AFP, "Blood diamonds: relative success of Kimberley Process in Sierra Leone", 20 May 2003.

⁹ Information received from Save the Children, 17 March 2003.

SRI LANKA

Government forces

There were no indications of recruitment or use of child soldiers by the Sri Lankan government.

Non-state armed groups

The armed opposition group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) continued to recruit and use children in violation of international law.¹ In January, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), set up to monitor the implementation of peace negotiations, reported an overall decrease in child soldier recruitment during previous months. However, media reports suggested there was an increase in the number of documented cases in January 2003,² and in February UNICEF stated it still had more than 700 complaints of child recruitment “on its books”.³ Both UNICEF and local organizations stated that many other cases could have gone unreported.⁴ The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers also received confidential information to suggest that in many cases children were recruited to the LTTE without the knowledge of their families, causing distress to parents once they realized their children had gone.⁵

In February 2003, an LTTE spokesperson said “the LTTE has made a solemn pledge to UNICEF to cease all recruitment of underage children...whenever children want to join we will now check their ages.”⁶ He also claimed that senior LTTE military leaders had been discharged following child recruitment investigations.⁷ However, later the same month a local newspaper reported a woman’s complaint to the Central Camp police station in Ampara about an LTTE threat to kill her if she did not give them her son, who supposedly had recently escaped from an LTTE camp.⁸ Later in February, the LTTE ordered a general strike in parts of the Trincomalee district in protest of the arrest of two of their female members on charges of abduction of two schoolgirls.⁹

On 20 March 2003, a child soldier was killed from gunshot wounds received during training at an LTTE camp in northwest Sri Lanka.¹⁰ The LTTE allegedly invited the boy’s parents to attend a service at the camp having refused to return his body to the family.¹¹ Also in March, a report by the University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR) documented several child abduction cases, indicating that most kidnappings occurred while children, many under 15, were returning from school in both government and LTTE-controlled territories.¹²

By the end of May UNICEF had reportedly received 1,370 complaints of child recruitment by the LTTE, and one source reported that there were 60 cases in the Batticaloa district alone between January and August.¹³ The UTHR-Jaffna reported that while the LTTE had promised to release 400 children, only a handful had been released, most of them unfit for combat roles.¹⁴

The February 2002 peace agreement allowed unarmed LTTE members to enter government-controlled territory, which has reportedly enabled the LTTE to kidnap children there. The National Child Protection Authority and opposition parties have criticized the government for its failure to protect children from LTTE abductions.¹⁵

Demobilization and child protection programs

In March 2003, UNICEF and the LTTE developed a detailed plan for the rehabilitation of child soldiers in the northeast.¹⁶ In April UNICEF facilitated a workshop attended by the government, LTTE members and civil society representatives. The purpose was to develop an action plan to address the needs and care of children affected by conflict, including child soldiers. The plan included: child rights training for the LTTE, government armed forces and communities; a “monitoring mechanism administered by UNICEF” for children in the North East; the establishment of transit centres for “release and reintegration” of child soldiers and those “seeking recruitment”; and mechanisms providing micro credit, vocational training, education, health and nutritional services, and psychosocial care.¹⁷ By mid-2003 elements of the action plan had begun to be implemented, including child rights awareness campaigns and construction of transit centres.¹⁸

In August construction began of a third transit centre, in Batticaloa district, to provide temporary care and accommodation for under-age recruits released by the LTTE.¹⁹ However, the management of the centres was widely criticized by NGOs and in the media. The centres will be run by the LTTE-run Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) with support from UNICEF, and are located in LTTE-controlled areas. Concern was expressed that access to the camps will be restricted by the LTTE, and that the government and National Child Protection Authority will have no say in running them.²⁰

Recommendations

- The United Nations (UN) Security Council should make the situation in Sri Lanka, including the extensive involvement of children in armed conflict, a high priority.
- The United Nations should increase its dialogue with the LTTE, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Sri Lanka should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies and partners should devote more resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers.

¹ Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission press release, 21 January 2003, <http://www.peaceinsrilanka.org>

² Beck, Lindsay, “Interview—Tamil Tigers committed to child soldiers plan- UN,” Reuters, 16 June 2003.

³ Weekly assessments and briefings: Sri Lanka, South Asia Intelligence Review, 17 February 2003.

⁴ Beck, Lindsay, “Interview—Tamil Tigers committed to child soldiers plan—UN,” Reuters, 16 June 2003; “Sri Lanka: LTTE Continues to Build its Child Army Unperturbed by Peace Talks”, Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, 23 April, 2003.

⁵ Information received confidentially by the Coalition in September 2003.

⁶ “Tamil Tigers Will Stop Using Child Soldiers,” The Scotsman, 10 February 2003.

⁷ “Tamil Tigers Will Stop Using Child Soldiers,” The Scotsman, 10 February 2003.

⁸ “‘Hand over son or face death,’ LTTE threatens mother,” The Island, 19

February 2003, <http://www.island.lk>

⁹ “Strike grips northeast Sri Lanka after child conscription charge [Corrected 02/17/03],” Agence France-Press, 17 February 2003.

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- ¹⁰ “Sri Lanka: Child Soldier Dies in LTTE Camp [News],” Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, 26 March, 2003.
- ¹¹ “Sri Lanka: Child Soldier Dies in LTTE Camp [News],” Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, 26 March, 2003.
- ¹² “Special Report No: 16” University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) Sri Lanka, 18 March 2003.
- ¹³ Hindustan Times, 17 August 2003, www.hindustantimes.com/news/181.341886.00050002.htm
- ¹⁴ Hindustan Times, 17 August 2003, www.hindustantimes.com/news/181.341886.00050002.htm
- ¹⁵ “Sri Lanka: LTTE Continues to Build its Child Army Unperturbed by Peace Talks,” Asia Child Rights Weekly Newsletter, 23 April, 2003.
- ¹⁶ “UNICEF, Tamil Tigers agree to new steps forward for children,” *Joint LTTE/UNICEF Press Release*, 4 March 2003.
- ¹⁷ “Government and LTTE agree on action plan to address the needs of children affected by war in the Northeast.” *Press Centre*, UNICEF, 11 April 2003.
- ¹⁸ Beck, Lindsay, “Interview–Tamil Tigers committed to child soldiers plan–UN,” Reuters, 16 June 2003.
- ¹⁹ UNICEF press release, 6 August 2003
- ²⁰ Hindustan Times, 17 August 2003, www.hindustantimes.com/news/181.341886.00050002.htm

SUDAN

Government forces

Child soldiers were forcibly recruited by the government paramilitary Popular Defence Forces, and by northern and southern militias supported by the Sudanese government in the areas around Bentiu.¹ Amnesty International received reports of youths picked up in Khartoum in December 2002, apparently for recruitment into the armed forces.²

Military activity renewed in January 2003, in the oil provinces of the Upper Nile (or Unity/Wahda Province), south of Bentiu. The attacks were carried out by the Sudanese army and southern militias allied to it against towns and villages, particularly those along a road being constructed by the Sudanese government between Bentiu and Adok. The attacks were preceded by forced recruitment of young men in Khartoum and of men and children in Bentiu, in late 2002. The Civilian Protection and Monitoring Team (CPMT), mandated to monitor attacks on civilians, also reported forced recruitment of children in Bentiu.³

In April 2003, The United Nations (UN) Commission on Human Rights expressed concern at the continued recruitment and use of children in the conflict in Sudan, in violation of international law.⁴ According to the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the Sudan, “I received reports on the forced recruitment by government-allied militias of children and adolescents into the armed factions in Unity State which point to the appalling figure of 667 school pupils—sometimes as young as 9 years old—who have been forced into recruitment, representing 22.2 per cent of the total pupil population enrolled in primary schools in Unity State.”⁵ In May 2003, the government reportedly deployed additional soldiers, including children, to the new front in North Darfur.⁶ The government also continued to use military uniforms as the mandatory school uniform for all secondary school children.

The government of Sudan violated international standards of juvenile justice in its treatment of child soldiers. A special court in Darfur sentenced minors aged 14 and 15 to detention and death, respectively, for raiding a village.⁷ The UN Special Rapporteur reported that an unconfirmed number of children had been kept in custody for desertion in Bahr al-Ghazal and sentenced to up to 20 years in prison.⁸ The Wali of Wau reportedly later released the children, stating that, as minors, they should not have been recruited in the first place.⁹

Non-state armed groups

Reports indicated continued abductions of children by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA).¹⁰ Demobilization of children stagnated and UNICEF estimated that 7,000-8,000 children remained with the SPLA.¹¹ Reports indicated that the re-recruitment and new recruitment of child soldiers occurred frequently.¹²

Tribal groups, not allied to government or armed opposition groups, also recruited small children to participate in raids against their neighbours.¹³

Demobilization and child protection programs

UNICEF, Save the Children and the SPLA continued to collaborate on the demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers; however, demobilization stagnated due to waning political and administrative commitment from the SPLA.¹⁴

In February 2003 the Humanitarian Aid Commission, in partnership with UNICEF, held the first workshop focused on child soldier demobilization in government-controlled areas. An action plan was developed, including establishing baseline information on the number and nature of child soldiers, advocating for the inclusion of children's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) issues in the peace agreement and increased coordination.¹⁵ In June 2003, the armed forces created an internal task force on the demobilization of children.

In May 2003, following an 18-month study, the independent Rift Valley Institute released "Ten Thousand Names", a database of 11,105 people abducted between 1983 and 2002. According to the study, 58 per cent of the missing were children under 18 when abducted.

Recommendations

- The UN should increase its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in Sudan, calling on them to respect international law prohibiting the recruitment and use of children.
- The demobilization of child soldiers from all parties to the war should be an essential part of any peace agreement.
- UN agencies should undertake a detailed survey of child soldiers to ensure adequate protection and demobilization programs.
- UN agencies working to demobilize and reintegrate child soldiers in Sudan should ensure appropriate coordination mechanisms with other multilateral, international and local organizations working on this issue.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.
- UN agencies and partners should devote more resources to reintegration and follow-up activities to reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers, including psycho-social support, family tracing and reunification, education and vocational training opportunities.
- The UN should promote child protection language in the Karen Peace Agreement negotiations, including the following specific provision on child soldiering: "All children under the age of 18 shall be demobilized from formal and informal armed forces, militia and armed groups within six months of the signature of this peace agreement. Furthermore, all children separated from their families who reside with or work for members of fighting forces and the families of the fighting forces, shall be registered for family tracing within six months of the signature of this peace agreement. The government shall mobilize resources, both within the country and from the international community, to address the special needs of all children in the processes of disarmament, demobilization, registration for family tracing, return and reintegration. UNICEF and other child protection agencies shall be invited to assist this process."

¹ AI, "Sudan: preliminary conclusions of Amnesty International's mission", 31 January 2003.

² AI, "Sudan: preliminary conclusions of Amnesty International's mission", 31 January 2003.

³ AI, "Sudan: Empty Promises? Human Rights violations in Government-controlled areas." (AI INDEX: AFR 54/036/2003 , 16 July 2003.

⁴ Commission on Human Rights, Question of The Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in any Part of The World, The situation of human rights in Sudan, E/CN.4/2003/L.35, 11 April 2003.

⁵ Statement by Mr. Gerhart Baum, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, UN Commission on Human Rights, April 2003.

⁶ Confidential information received from Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (Coalition) member in Sudan, 2 July 2003.

⁷ AI, 1 March 2003; Commission on Human Rights, Question of The Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in any Part of The World, The situation of human rights in Sudan, E/CN.4/2003/L.35, 11 April 2003. AI Index: AFR 54/029/2003.

⁸ Commission on Human Rights, Question of The Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in any Part of The World, The situation of human rights in Sudan, E/CN.4/2003/42, 6.1.03

⁹ Commission on Human Rights, Question of The Violation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms in any Part of The World, The situation of human rights in Sudan, E/CN.4/2003/42, 6.1.03.

¹⁰ IRIN, "Sudan: Monitoring body documents more violations", 24 June 2003.

¹¹ Confidential information received from Coalition member in Sudan, 2 July 2003.

¹² Confidential information received from Coalition member in Sudan, 2 July 2003.

¹³ Information received from Coalition partner, June 2003.

¹⁴ Confidential information received from Coalition member in Sudan, 2 July 2003.

¹⁵ Atfal, Press Release, February 2003.

UGANDA

Government forces

In March 2003, Human Rights Watch documented on-going recruitment of children into Local Defence Units (LDUs), which were intended to provide security to local villages, but were reportedly used to fight with the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) against the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, and even in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan.¹ Recent reports from Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers partners on the ground indicated on-going child recruitment into the UPDF, including of children who had escaped from the LRA. Coalition members have also reported recruitment of children into local defence groups in northern Uganda, especially the Arrow Group. On a recent visit to Lugore training camp, UNICEF identified 120 children among the recruits.² Reliable sources also identified UPDF recruits among demobilized child soldiers in Yumbe.³ International organizations were not granted access to many more military training camps where it was suspected that many more children were held.

At least two children formerly with the LRA were detained by the government on treason charges, despite the amnesty in place.

Non-state armed groups

The LRA increased abductions of children for use as combatants, sexual slaves, porters, cooks and domestic workers in 2003. UNICEF estimated that 8,400 children were abducted between June 2002 and May 2003. Children abducted by the LRA described being forced to carry out raids, burn houses, beat and kill civilians, abduct other children, and fight against the UPDF. Girls were used as domestic servants and forced into sexual slavery as "wives" of LRA commanders.

In mid-2003 LRA abductions spread from the traditional Acholi and neighbouring areas of the north into the east. Continued abductions, recruitment and instability had a devastating effect on local populations, particularly in previously safe communities, where coping mechanisms were not yet in place. An army spokesperson reported in June 2003 that LRA soldiers had abducted 30 schoolgirls aged between 12 and 18 from a secondary school in Kabermaido district, in Northeastern Uganda.⁴ On 17 August 2003, the LRA killed more than a dozen former LRA captives with machetes during an attack in a village in the Lira district, and abducted 40 children.⁵

On 14 July 2003, an estimated 20,000 children marched in Kitgum to protest continued abductions by the LRA.⁶ A similar children's march took place in Gulu in August.⁷

Human Rights Watch reported a dramatic rise in "night commuters", children who move into towns and villages at night, coming back in the morning to reduce the risk of abduction. The organization said that the number of night commuters in Gulu had tripled between February and May 2003 to over 13,000.⁸ In July 2003, The Monitor estimated that 20,000 children were estimated to seek safety each night in Gulu, Pader and Kitgum towns.⁹ Other estimates suggested 20,000-30,000 young "night commuters" in Gulu town alone.¹⁰

Demobilization and child protection programs

Children “rescued” from the LRA by the UPDF were kept in military confinement, sometimes for protracted periods, to gather intelligence before being transferred to the Child Protection Unit, and then to rehabilitation programs operated by NGOs including World Vision and the Gulu Save Our Children Organization (GUSCO).¹¹ The 120 recruits identified at the Lugore training camp were demobilized and were taking part in counselling and reintegration programs. In response to the influx of “night commuters”, child protection agencies and church groups established programs to feed and shelter these children.

Recommendations

- The Government of Uganda should respect its international obligations to take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment of children under 18 and to demobilize and rehabilitate all former child soldiers.
- The United Nations (UN) should enter into dialogue with the Government of Uganda on its continued recruitment of children into LDUs and the UPDF, with a view to immediately ending this practice.
- The UN should develop strategies to protect children vulnerable to abduction by the LRA.
- DDR programs should take into account the specific needs of girls, former child soldiers who have attained the age of majority, and other vulnerable youth who may be marginalized from existing processes.

¹ Human Rights Watch, “Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda,” Vol.15, No 7(A), HRW: March 2003.

² Information obtained from UNICEF and the Uganda Coalition, June 2003.

³ Information obtained from Coalition member on the ground who requested anonymity, 26 June 2003.

⁴ Reuters, “Uganda rebels abduct schoolgirls in night raid”, 25 June 2003.

⁵ Associated Press, “Ugandan rebels kill former captives”, 18 August 2003.

⁶ The Monitor (Kampala), 20,000 Children March Against Kony”, 15 July 2003.

⁷ Dow Jones International News, “Thousands of Uganda School Children March, Call for Peace”, 23 August 2003.

⁸ HRW, “Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda,” July 2003.

⁹ The Monitor (Kampala), 20,000 Children March Against Kony”, 15 July 2003.

¹⁰ Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative statement, June 26, 2003; Commission for Justice and Peace, cited in

“Thousands of Uganda School Children March, Call for Peace”, Dow Jones International News, 23 August 2003.

¹¹ Coalition interviews with child soldiers and NGO workers, Gulu, 5-6 March 2003.