

Summary

My son went to join the rebels when he was 14 years old. One day he didn't come home from school. All that night I couldn't sleep. I was thinking, where is he sleeping? Does he have any food? Was he killed on the road? In the morning I sent my daughter to his friends' houses and they told her that he'd gone off with one of his friends to join the rebels.

After the Guéréda battle [December 1, 2006] my son came home. He walked into the house, took off his rifle and his cartridge belt, washed his hands and feet and said his prayers. He thought he was a man but he was still a boy. I asked him where he'd been and he looked down and giggled, like he was ashamed. I asked him, "Why did you leave? I never yelled at you. If you needed something I would have given it to you." He said he left because his family members were being killed, so he was obliged to become a soldier. I said, "Isn't that rifle heavy? You can barely lift it." He said, "It's not heavy." I said, "That rifle's so big it's going to split your chest." Since that day he hasn't been back home. He said I talk too much.

—Aisha, a 38-year-old woman in Guéréda whose 14-year-old son joined the FUC rebels in 2006

When Aisha (not her real name) spoke to Human Rights Watch in March 2007, she might have had reason to believe that her son would soon set aside his rifle and return home. After all, the rebel group her son had joined, the *Front Uni pour le Changement* (United Front for Change, FUC), had signed a peace treaty with the Chadian government in December. Peace, however, did not bring security, and the December 2006 peace accord actually put pressure on FUC rebels to increase recruitment. In January Aisha sent her 20-year-old son to retrieve his younger brother from the FUC ranks, but he too joined the rebels. Now she fears that she may have lost both of her sons to a conflict so greedy for foot soldiers that boys and even girls have come to be considered soldier material.

The Chadian National Army (*Armée Nationale Tchadienne*, ANT) is struggling to defeat a Chadian rebel insurgency. In the fall of 2006 both the government and the rebels turned to the recruitment of children as a matter of military survival. Children as young as eight serve as fighters, guards, cooks, and lookouts on the front lines of the conflict.

In some areas of eastern Chad the political dynamics of the Chad conflict intersect with localized inter-ethnic tensions and violence. Children escaping rampant insecurity sometimes fled directly into the ranks of paramilitary groups such as the FUC (FUC forces are concentrated in Dar Tama, a department in northeastern Chad where a climate of generalized insecurity has led to violent attacks against civilians). In December 2006, the Chadian government made peace with the FUC, hitherto one of its most formidable rebel opponents. But by agreeing to contribute many more soldiers to the government army than it had under arms, the FUC was obliged to conduct aggressive manpower drives. Insecurity in Dar Tama continued to drive many children to seek safety in the ranks of the FUC, including schoolchildren. But at the same time, active recruitment on the part of the FUC, including promises of money, pulled children into the group. Human Rights Watch does not have evidence of ongoing recruitment of children on the part of the FUC, but girls and boys continue to serve in the FUC, and some children have fought alongside adult soldiers as combatants.

Since May 2007 both the Chadian government and the FUC have been cooperating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to identify and demobilize child soldiers in their ranks. While this is to be applauded, questions remain about the extent to which the government's stated commitment to these efforts is being translated to the field level, and interviews with ANT commanders indicate that Chadian military personnel may attempt to exclude children from the demobilization process. In this light, it is perhaps noteworthy that of the 413 children demobilized from Chadian government military installations since May, all were former FUC fighters. Chad's Ministry of Defense has promised UNICEF access to Chadian military installations, but UNICEF has only been able to visit a single military base since May. Requests by UNICEF for access to two other sites had not been granted at this writing.

Human Rights Watch believes the demobilization underway cannot be considered comprehensive unless it is consistently applied and enforced throughout the

Chadian military apparatus, including in the paramilitary forces that serve as Chadian government proxies, such as village-level self-defense forces and Sudanese rebel groups. Access to all military installations must become a reality, and international child protection officials must be able to make spot inspections on all Chadian military bases and camps, including in frontline areas and among armed groups that are affiliated with the Chadian government, be it formally or informally. Even with rehabilitation and reintegration programs that are specifically tailored to the needs of children, demobilized child soldiers will be at significant risk of re-recruitment as long as the rule of the gun remains unchallenged in eastern Chad.

France has taken the lead on pressuring the government of Chad to demobilize its child soldiers, but other countries with an interest in Chad, particularly those that cooperate militarily with Chad, such as the United States, must make similar efforts to press for the respect of international humanitarian and human rights law in Chad, including the immediate demobilization of child soldiers.

A United Nations protection mission has been proposed by the United Nations Security Council for deployment to eastern Chad, but the proposal has met persistent opposition from Chadian government officials. An international protection mission for civilians in eastern Chad would represent a significant step toward bringing security to violent and volatile areas where children have been recruited into armed groups and where they continue to serve in roles that international law restricts to adults.

Methodology

This report draws on field work conducted over the course of four Human Rights Watch research missions to conflict zones of eastern Chad since January 2006.¹ Human Rights Watch researchers have noted the use of child soldiers in the Chadian National Army (ANT), ANT-integrated rebel forces (namely the FUC), village-level self-defense forces, and two Sudanese rebel movements: the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the G-19 faction of the Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA). Each of these armed groups acts in defense of the Chadian government, yet this report will focus primarily on the use and recruitment of child soldiers by the ANT and the FUC. It does not encompass Chadian rebel groups actively fighting the Chadian government.

All child soldiers referred to in this report are male unless specifically identified as female. A child is considered to be anyone under the age of 18.

Due to the sensitive nature of the research, Human Rights Watch has withheld the names of most interview subjects, as well as contextual information such as military rank or interview location when such information might compromise a source's identity. Sources inside the Chadian military insisted on strict conditions of confidentiality and secrecy, eschewing mobile phones for fear of surveillance and arranging meetings via third parties. In some cases pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identity of interview subjects.

¹ See Human Rights Watch, *Darfur Bleeds: Recent Cross-Border Violence in Chad*, no.2, February, 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/chado206/>; Human Rights Watch, *Violence Beyond Borders: The Human Rights Crisis in Eastern Chad*, no. 4, June 2006, <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/chado606/>; Human Rights Watch, *They Came Here to Kill Us: Militia Attacks and Ethnic Targeting of Civilians in Eastern Chad*, vol. 19, no. 1(A), January 2007, <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/chado107/>.

Recommendations

To the Government of Chad

- Immediately end all recruitment of persons under age 18, whether for use as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, guards, or for any other military purpose;
- Demobilize all children under age 18 from all Chadian National Army (ANT) forces, including self-defense militias and all other paramilitary groups receiving Chadian government support, and transfer them to their families or to appropriate child protection agencies;
- Ensure that all forces under the control of the Chadian government are reminded that recruitment and use of children as soldiers is illegal, and that recruitment and use of children under the age of 15 as soldiers is a war crime that will be prosecuted;
- Investigate whether war crimes, including the recruitment and use of children under 15 as soldiers, have occurred in Chad since the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court entered into force in Chad on January 1, 2007;
- Establish appropriate procedures for prosecuting any local or regional commanders who recruit children to act as soldiers or who do not immediately release children;
- Give all adults recruited into the ANT before age 18 the option to leave ANT forces;
- Cooperate with UNICEF and other national and international monitors to ensure compliance with commitments to end the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers;
- Provide international agencies such as the ICRC, UNICEF, OCHA, and OHCHR full and unhindered access to all military camps and installations for verification purposes, including bases and training camps at N'Djamena, Koundoul, Moussouro, Fada, Biltine and Am Timan, and to frontline troops in and around Adré and throughout eastern Ouaddai region;
- Allow international humanitarian observers to conduct spot inspections at all military camps and installations;

- Fully cooperate with all efforts to rehabilitate demobilized child soldiers, including their reintegration back into their home communities;
- Formalize the inclusion of the FUC and paramilitary groups such as self-defense forces into the ANT, and partner with agencies including the ICRC, UNICEF, OCHA, and OHCHR in this process; and
- Immediately release all prisoners of war under age 18 to the care of the appropriate agencies, and allow national and international human rights monitors unhindered access to facilities where children may be detained.

To the FUC

- Immediately end all recruitment of persons under 18, whether for use as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers, guards, or for any other military purpose;
- Demobilize children under age 18 from all armed forces, and transfer them to their families or to appropriate child protection agencies;
- Ensure that all FUC forces are reminded that recruitment and use of children as soldiers is illegal, and that recruitment and use of children under 15 as soldiers is a war crime that will be prosecuted;
- Establish appropriate procedures for reporting for the purpose of investigation and prosecution any local or regional commanders who recruit children or who do not immediately release children;
- Speedily complete the integration of all FUC units into the traditional channels of command and control in the ANT;
- Cooperate with UNICEF and other national and international monitors to ensure compliance with an end to the recruitment and deployment of child soldiers, and provide international agencies such as the ICRC, UNICEF, OCHA, and OHCHR full and unhindered access to all military installations and forces for verification purposes, including permitting observers to make spot inspections;
- Provide international agencies such as the ICRC, UNICEF, OCHA, and OHCHR full and unhindered access to all military camps and installations for verification purposes, including bases and training camps at Guéréda, Aramkolle, Birak, Bali, and Dakhalaka;

- Allow international humanitarian observers to conduct spot inspections at all military camps and installations; and
- Fully cooperate with all efforts to rehabilitate demobilized child soldiers, including their reintegration back into their home communities.

To UNICEF

- Use all available means to enhance cooperation with the government of Chad in identifying all persons under age 18 in armed forces and groups, and in facilitating their transfer to appropriate rehabilitation programs;
- Work with local communities and local nongovernmental organizations in order to effectively monitor child recruitment, put in place effective prevention strategies, and support the reintegration of children into their communities;
- Strengthen appropriate coordination mechanisms including information sharing with other multilateral, international, and local organizations working on this issue;
- Establish a UNICEF field office in Guéréda;
- 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; and
- To reduce risks of re-recruitment of child soldiers, devote resources to reintegration and follow-up activities including psychosocial support, family tracing and reunification, and education and vocational training.

To the Government of the United States

- Make all military assistance and cooperation, including the pending sale of C-130 aircraft, contingent on the Chadian government's continued progress toward demobilizing child soldiers and preventing their re-recruitment, and establish a monitoring mechanism to track progress;
- Pass the bill pending before the US Senate entitled the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2007 (S. 1175), making governments involved in the recruitment or use of child soldiers ineligible for some US military financing, training, or arms transfers; and

- Appoint a special envoy to Chad to ensure that US efforts to protect civilians in Darfur neither ignore nor contribute to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law in Chad.

To the Government of France

- Partner with the Chadian military as observers, specifically to monitor violations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

To the European Union

- Approve the deployment of an international protection mission to eastern Chad, as set forth in Human Rights Watch's February 21, 2007 briefing paper "Ensuring Civilian Protection in Chad: The Proposed UN Mission."

To the United Nations Security Council

- Urge the Chadian government and the FUC to immediately end all child recruitment and to demobilize all children from their forces;
- Ensure that the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict closely monitors the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Chad, and recommends appropriate steps if adequate progress is not achieved;
- Have local N'Djamena missions of Security Council members meet with the Chadian government to insist on progress in the demobilization of children, in accordance with Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict; and
- Approve the deployment of an international protection mission to eastern Chad, as set forth in Human Rights Watch's February 21, 2007 briefing paper "Ensuring Civilian Protection in Chad: The Proposed UN Mission."

To the Donor Community

- Ensure that financial commitments for demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration programming for child soldiers in Chad are adequate and sustained.