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ISSUE 15/JANUARY 2007

CHILDSOLDIERS newsletter



A newsletter produced by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

PREVENTION OF CHILD RECRUITMENT AND USE

In this issue of the Child Soldiers Newsletter we look at prevention and the challenges involved in stopping children from becoming soldiers in the first place. The international human rights and humanitarian community has long realized that the issue of prevention in the fight against the recruitment and use of child soldiers is as important as their demobilization and reintegration.

Initially, efforts were aimed at ensuring governments signed up to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol), and demobilized existing children from their forces and those of non-state armed groups operating in their territories. Later, it became increasingly apparent that new strategies had to be adopted to prevent children from joining or returning to armed groups and that these had to involve all stakeholders, including governments, aid agencies, NGOs, non-state actors and local communities. We look at some of these initiatives in this issue.

Our new Director, Victoria Forbes Adam, sets out the challenges in the **Editorial**, where she argues for a holistic approach in dealing with the complex issues involved in prevention work. In **Voices of Youth**, we hear from the Children's Parliament in Rafah, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, a unique example of peaceful child participation in the context of an armed conflict.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, we explore the relationship between the proliferation of **small arms and light**

Poster campaign to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflict in Colombia. The poster reads: "Stay here, we are with you: Involving yourself in the armed conflict takes you nowhere".

weapons and the continuous use of children as soldiers, focusing on the responsibilities of the international community to halt the illegal arms trade in the region. We also look at what lessons can be learned from our partners' work with **children in organized armed violence** in Brazil and elsewhere. In our **Action Appeal** we urge the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to agree to a UN human rights monitoring mission, while we deplore the continuing recruitment of children by the Karuna group.

Our partners in the Philippines share their experience on working with non-state armed groups in **human rights education** and we show the work of local communities in **sports and prevention** in Colombia. We also look at how state party reports to the **Committee on the Rights of the Child** can help highlight difficulties in applying the Optional Protocol, one of the most important tools in the fight against the use of child soldiers.



EDITORIAL

PREVENTING CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT IN ARMED CONFLICT – WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS?

ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS NEWSLETTER

Child Soldiers Newsletter is a free publication bringing you news, information and campaign updates from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC).

All submissions to the newsletter are the sole responsibility of contributing authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Coalition, its founding organizations or members.

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A print version in French is also available.

Spanish, German and French versions are available on the Coalition website, and also by email upon request. We encourage you to distribute the newsletter widely to friends and contacts.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) works to prevent the use of children as soldiers and to promote their demobilization, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The CSC is comprised of national, regional and international organizations and coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Its member organizations are Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, Jesuit Refugee Service, Quaker United Nations Office – Geneva, International Save the Children Alliance and International Federation Terre des Hommes.

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Design: Samson + associates
Editor: Claudia Ricca
Print: JAMM Print & Productions

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The Child Soldiers Coalition Educational and Research Trust is registered as a charity (no. 1095237) in England.

This issue looks at the strategies needed for the long term prevention of children's recruitment and use in armed conflict. Children become "child soldiers" for many reasons. While thousands are forcibly recruited, the majority enlist "voluntarily" for lack of any alternative. War itself is a major motive, but children's lack of access to education or employment is a key determinant. Frustrated by poverty and inequality, children (and adults) also take up arms to fight for social change. Girls may see enlistment as a way out of marriage and other forms of exploitation.

In other words, children often see the military route as the most effective available livelihood strategy. If these underlying issues are not addressed, children will remain at risk of recruitment or use in future armed conflict as well as other forms of armed activity.

What then needs to be done? First governments must pledge to uphold international laws prohibiting the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict, and must act to criminalize recruitment in national law. The traffic and flow of weapons, particularly small arms and light weapons, must be controlled and regulated. Proper birth registration procedures must be established so that children are not deliberately or inadvertently enlisted into the armed forces. The laws must be enforced and those who break them brought to justice.

Training is necessary for judicial, police and other law enforcement authorities to ensure that children are treated with full respect for their rights and dignity when in confrontation with the law. Repressive measures are likely to fuel further violence and push children toward involvement with armed groups. Efforts to address children's involvement in criminal activities must be aimed at their reintegration into society.

Whilst laws and effective law enforcement are a vital first step, they are not in themselves sufficient. An effective prevention strategy will require comprehensive policies to ensure that children's rights to education, healthcare and employment are respected. Ultimately children must be given the resources to meet their needs and actively participate in community and society. Steps must be taken to address domestic violence and sexual abuse, as well as all forms of economic exploitation. And ways must be found for children to speak out – and be heard – if they are abused.

Communities and young people themselves have a major role to play in prevention. In many regions, community leaders, activists and families have initiated discussions on child protection, often reaffirming the community's own values and traditions in this sphere. Former child soldiers have participated in this process of reflection. In some regions, communities have engaged with non-state armed groups – on the need to respect humanitarian principles and stop the recruitment or use of children in armed conflict. When linked to knowledge of national laws and policies prohibiting recruitment, communities have developed powerful tools to prevent their children from being recruited – whether forcibly or voluntarily – by armed forces and groups.

The international community must support these efforts by providing sustained funding for the development of laws, policies and community projects to keep children safe in their homes, schools and communities and when in contact with police and the criminal justice system.

This issue of the newsletter explores the various elements needed to prevent children from involvement with armed forces and groups. The articles demonstrate the importance of a holistic approach involving governments, communities and young people themselves in the process of preventing recruitment in the long term.

Victoria Forbes Adam

Director, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers



GIVING A VOICE TO PALESTINIAN CHILDREN

Enrique Restoy, Program Manager

The Mini Parliament at the border city of Rafah, south of Gaza, was created in 1996 to introduce children to the basics of democracy and freedom through participation in debates about things that matter to them. The Mini Parliament discusses political and social issues about Palestine and has condemned the ONU, the Arab League and George Bush for failing to protect Palestinian children.

The Rafah Mini Parliament is composed of 88 rotating members, and over 1,000 boys and girls aged between 9 and 15 have participated since it began in 1996. Its structure mirrors the Palestinian Legislative Council, including its various commissions. The entire Mini Parliament meets every week to discuss issues concerning Palestinian children. The Coalition visited the Mini Parliament in early 2006.

Nasser¹, 13, says, "We discuss everything that we think is important in our lives. We discuss Bush and Sharon, because they come and destroy our houses."

The Mini Parliament has organized staged "trials" of those who, in their view, have failed to protect Palestinian children. George Bush, Ariel Sharon, the Arab League and UNICEF have all been "indicted" by the Parliament so far.

"We invited them all to come and defend themselves, so far only UNICEF has met with us", says Noha, a 14 year old girl who has been a member of the Mini Parliament for two years.

Nasser Abdallah, a social worker who provides logistical and administrative

support to the Mini Parliament, denies that the children are manipulated by politicians or used to vindicate the demands of adults:

"It is true that children discuss very political issues, but this is what they experience every day under the [Israeli] occupation. They choose the issues they want to debate and how they want to do it."

Issa, 16, who has been president of the Mini Parliament for the past few months, articulates the objectives of the institution:

"We wanted to talk about our problems and ask the world to listen to the plight of Palestinian children. We don't want to be killed throwing stones, but we want to be useful to our people's struggle."

WORDS INSTEAD OF STONES

The first sessions of the Mini Parliament enjoyed wide international media coverage, but that attention has been difficult to sustain. Noha admits: "we need to find other ways of being heard, but it is difficult. When we've wanted to rally peacefully we have been attacked by the occupying forces."

Nasser Abdallah, the social worker, asks members of the Mini Parliament who are hanging around the office or playing with the only computer in the room, to gather with us. They chat and giggle when we ask them, "What is the best thing about the Mini Parliament?" Fatima replies, "We make friends and learn democracy", and Amara adds, "And we can discuss what we hear on the telly". When they learn I am from Spain, one of them promptly asks,



Some members of the Rafah Mini Parliament in Gaza City, Gaza Strip, Occupied Palestinian Territories.

© Child Soldiers Coalition/Enrique Restoy, 2006.

"Why is Spain processing Tayseer Allouni? Isn't this against freedom of expression?" Allouni is a former Al Jazeera correspondent in Spain, accused of belonging to the Al Qaida network. In response, we manage to utter a few words about the independence of the judiciary and the standards needed for fair trials, but the children appear utterly unimpressed...

Presented as a model for preventing Palestinian children from being actively involved in the conflict, it's difficult to assess the success of the Mini Parliament so far. However, we notice that the children talk about democracy and what we should be doing to help them. They don't mention martyrdom or being part of the struggle as we hear elsewhere in Palestine.

As we leave the Mini Parliament, the children go back to their business. They will play and talk, like any other children, but as long as they are so exposed to violence, they will talk peace and live war.

¹ Actual names in this article have been changed



ACTIONS AGAINST IMPUNITY

DRC:

ICC PRE-TRIAL OF THOMAS LUBANGA STARTS IN THE HAGUE

In what could become the first case for the International Criminal Court (ICC), the hearing for the confirmation of charges against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo started on 9 November 2006 in The Hague. It will also be the first time in international criminal law that victims have been able to participate in the proceedings, which are expected to last until 28 November. The Pre-Trial Chamber then has 60 days to decide whether or not to confirm the charges brought by the Prosecutor against Lubanga. If the charges are confirmed, the Presidency of the Court will constitute a Trial Chamber responsible for subsequent hearings.

Thomas Lubanga Dyilo is charged on the basis of individual criminal responsibility under Article 25 (3) (a) of the Rome Statute, of war crimes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the war crime of enlisting children under the age of fifteen; the war crime of conscription of children under the age of fifteen; and the war crime of using children under the age of fifteen to participate actively in hostilities.

Source: ICC, November 2006

LIBERIA:

WITNESSES TELL LIBERIA TRUTH COMMISSION OF CIVIL WAR ABUSES

Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) began hearing public testimony on 10 October 2006, with several people testifying about the crimes and abuse that occurred during the country's 14-year civil war. Four of the nine TRC commissioners heard testimony in Monrovia, while the remaining five travelled throughout the country to gather testimonies.

The TRC has a two year mandate and began its work in June after its inauguration in February 2006. It will make recommendations to the government on who should be granted reparations, receive amnesty or face prosecution. Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has said that the commission is intended to heal the war-torn country and uncover the truth about the civil war, but the TRC has been criticized by human rights groups who instead advocate for a Liberian human rights court because the TRC cannot prosecute war crimes violations.

Source: Jurst, October 2006

BURUNDI:

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT

Concerned about persistent rapes, killings, the detainment and military recruitment of children in Burundi, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on all parties to immediately work towards ending these crimes and prosecuting offenders, as the central African nation makes a transition from civil war to peace and democracy.

Mr. Annan urged that children's rights remain at the forefront of the newly forged peace, which began in September with a Comprehensive Ceasefire Agreement that ended 12 years of civil war.

Source: CRIN, November 2006

NON-STATE ARMED GROUPS

MYANMAR/BURMA:

GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO RECRUIT CHILD SOLDIERS

In September 2006, Human rights NGO and Coalition partner HREIB said Burma's military regime continues to recruit large numbers of children into its army, sending boys as young as 12 into combat despite a high-level committee set up to stop the practice. It said that the plight of child soldiers in Burma has remained essentially unchanged over the past four years, but a senior Burma information ministry official denied the report: "These allegations of child recruitment are based on information compiled by anti-government groups and dissidents."

Source: Associated Press, September 2006

UGANDA:

PEACE AGREEMENT WELCOMED

In August 2006 UNICEF welcomed the agreement between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to cease hostilities, aimed at ending 20 years of armed conflict. The agreement calls on the LRA to re-locate and make special provisions for any non-essential members of the LRA in the care of specialized humanitarian agencies. UNICEF has urged the prompt return of all children and women who have been separated from their families and communities in northern Uganda.

Source: UNICEF, August 2006

LEGISLATION ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN

USA:

CONGRESS CONSIDERS NEW DRAFT LAW ON CHILD SOLDIERS

A new draft law aimed at ending the use of child soldiers in hostilities around the world was introduced at the House of Representative of the US Congress on 28 July 2006. Once passed, Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2006 would commit the US government to supporting efforts to establish and uphold international standards on child soldiers; expanding ongoing services to rehabilitate recovered child soldiers and reintegrate them back into their communities; and working with the international community to bring to justice rebel organizations that kidnap children for use as child soldiers.

The US government would be prohibited from providing funds for international military education and training, foreign military financing or sales, as well as direct commercial sales of excess defence articles to the government of a country that was clearly identified by the Department of State as having governmental armed forces or government supported armed groups that recruit or use child soldiers.

Source: US Library of Congress, July 2006



DEMOBILIZATION, REINTEGRATION AND CHILDREN IN POST CONFLICT SITUATIONS

COLOMBIA:

UN OHCHR CONDEMNS FARC AND ELN FOR WAR CRIMES IN ARAUCA

In August 2006, the Colombia Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) condemned the targeted killing, child recruitment, and forced recruitment and displacement of hundred of individuals in Arauca. The Office reminded members of the FARC and ELN that these crimes are serious violations of international humanitarian law as well as war crimes.

In September, municipal authorities in Saravena, a town in Arauca, reported new cases of child recruitment by the FARC. Local schools have reported a marked increase in absenteeism, due to rumours of increased recruitment by armed opposition groups. The FARC have denied recruiting minors from schools or by force: "It's not our policy... they come voluntarily". Authorities in Arauca have now placed police officers outside schools.

Source: Colombia Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, August 2006 / AP, September 2006

DRC:

REBELS WANT TO JOIN ARMY

Taking advantage of the presidential elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) at the end of October, rebel general Laurent Nkunda, in North Kivu, stated that the new president would be forced to listen to rebel leaders if he wanted to reunify the country. An international arrest warrant was issued for Nkunda after his men were accused of committing war crimes during the seizure of the town of Bukavu in 2004. His men are also accused of continuing to recruit children as fighters, but Nkunda denies this. "...we work with ability and efficiency. A child soldier can be neither able nor efficient." Nkunda remains at large because the DRC's army is in chaos, poorly paid and divided. As a defender of Rwandan language-speaking Congolese, Nkunda enjoys the support of local politicians and military units and his forces number several thousand. Many see him and his men as testimony of the failures of DRC's post-war transition.

Source: News24, South Africa, October 2006

PHILIPPINES:

NPA STILL RECRUITING CHILDREN

Three suspected New People's Army (NPA) teenage combatants were detained in Palawan province in late August 2006 and turned over to the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). In October, two girls reportedly identified as members of the NPA were detained by the Philippines army in a remote village in Catbalogan. Reports indicated that the father of one of the girls was an active member of the NPA. The 7,400-strong NPA is the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and has been waging a guerrilla campaign in rural areas for 37 years.

Source: INQ7.net, August 2006 / Philippines Inquirer, October 2006

SUDAN:

250 CHILDREN DEMOBILIZED

In Southern Sudan, about 250 children were demobilized in Upper Nile State in late April 2006, the biggest demobilization since the signature of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005.

Since 2001, an estimated 20,000 children from the former southern rebel forces, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), have been disarmed and demobilized and returned to their families and communities. However, there are an estimated 2,000 children still associated with the SPLA, mainly in non-combat roles and in hard-to-reach areas, and an unknown number of under-18s in other armed groups in Southern Sudan.

Source: UNICEF, April 2006

LIBERIA/SPAIN:

FORMER CHILD SOLDIER SEEKS ASYLUM IN SPAIN

Migration authorities in Spain were considering a young Liberian man's request for asylum after he arrived in Bilbao, Northern Spain, as a stowaway, in September 2006. The man told authorities he had escaped from Liberia in 2000 where "he had been forcibly recruited at the age of 12, tortured and threatened with death". NGOs in Spain welcomed the news, as Spain has a poor record in considering asylum claims. According to official statistics, 70 percent of all asylum claims are dismissed in the first instance, while only 7 percent of claims processed are successful.

Source: Europa Press, September 2006

DRC:

DEMOBILIZED YOUTH FACING RE-RECRUITMENT

The head of the army in Ituri District, DRC, has said some militias are re-arming and fighting again, despite undertakings given to the government in July to demobilize their combatants and hand over weapons. Thousands of former combatants now in Bunia are under pressure to rejoin the militias and those still wanting to disarm have been threatened or killed. Many of the youth in Bunia are fleeing to villages while other former combatants are rejoining their militias and buying weapons from government troops.

Source: Reuters, September 2006

UGANDA:

FORMER CHILD SOLDIER STARTS CHARITY

Ugandan middleweight boxer and former child soldier, Kassim 'The Dream' Ouma, has started a charity to help people in Uganda, providing aid and assistance to his native land and in particular promoting clean water sources. On presenting his project, Ouma said that, "Even if it is just raising awareness and making connections between people I want people to know why we need clean water. When I was a child soldier [in the Ugandan army] we would drink anything we had to. It's not just an African problem. Lots of poor people can't find clean water. We want to help, whether with money when we can or just highlighting the issue. Everybody can contribute."

Source: The Monitor, Kampala, October 2006

PREVENTION

PROLIFERATION OF LIGHT WEAPONS AND THE IMPACT ON CHILD SOLDIERS IN THE DRC

Héloïse Ruaudel, Program Manager¹

The uncontrolled increase in small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to fuel the armed conflict, where children are involved as soldiers. Organizations working against SALW and for the rights of children have yet to coordinate their actions to increase the effectiveness of their lobbying on this issue.

- **Small arms and light weapons kill and disable more children and adults than any other instrument of violence, in conflict and post-conflict situations worldwide.²**
- **Between 2000 and 2003, over 200,000 Congolese met violent deaths, up to 90 percent of them from gunshots (Small Arms Survey 2005).**
- **The International Rescue Committee has estimated that since 1998 nearly four million people have died as a result of conflict in the DRC and roughly half of them were women and children.**
- **Fighting continues in eastern DRC – despite a peace deal in 2002 – fuelled by weapons and ammunitions from around the world.**
- **50 to 60 percent of weapons found in DRC are AK-47s.³**

Small Arms are designed for personal use. They include revolvers and self-loading pistols, assault rifles, sub-machine guns, rifles, carbines and light machine-guns. Light weapons, such as heavy machine guns, portable anti-aircraft guns and missiles, mortars and anti-tank missile and rocket systems, are sometimes mounted on vehicles and require more than one person to operate.

AVREO,⁴ the volunteer association for the recuperation of war-orphans, abandoned, malnourished and displaced children, based in South Kivu, is a member of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in DRC. It works to bring together efforts to control small arms, and protect children, through awareness raising campaigns and prevention activities. It trains the military and the community on the dangers of arms proliferation for children.

Since 1996 the DRC has been involved in armed conflicts with seven other countries.⁵ As a consequence of these conflicts there has been a massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), while illegal arms trafficking continues to fuel conflicts in the region. The wide availability of small arms has meant that more individuals become combatants, conflicts last longer, and more people, especially children, suffer. Many small arms remain after a conflict ends, and their resulting availability may allow conflicts to re-ignite.⁶ Arms circulation has fed and contributed to the on-going state of insecurity especially in eastern DRC where it remains a major obstacle for the peace and democratization process and the overall sustained development of the country.

In the early 1990s few weapons were in circulation, but with the spread of the conflict arms became more easily and cheaply available. As a consequence, armed groups proliferated and

committed massive human rights violations, including killings, rape and the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. The high prevalence of small arms, which are light and easy to use, has perpetuated a culture of violence affecting all levels of society, including children. All sides have deliberately distributed weapons to civilians and as a result more civilians are armed, including pastoralists, farmers, mine-workers, traders and children.

A CONTINUOUS STREAM OF LIGHT WEAPONS

There is no systematic monitoring of light weapons in DRC and no clear data on the number of arms in circulation. However, a field assessment carried out by the UN Development Program (UNDP) in February and March 2002, found a massive concentration of weapons in the region, numbering millions, and in particular in eastern, North and South Kivu, and northern Katanga regions.⁷ Factors that compromise

Boys stand behind barbed wire that forms a protective barrier around the perimeter of a camp for some 9,000 displaced people near the airport in the town of Bunia in the eastern region of Ituri. The camp, created in May 2003 following an upsurge in violence in Ituri, is protected by peacekeepers from the United Nations Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC). The boys are hoping to sell batteries and other items to some of the peacekeeping soldiers who have an adjacent encampment.

© UNICEF/HQ03-0350/ ROGER LEMOYNE



the implementation of initiatives set-up to eradicate the proliferation of illegal arms include non-compliance with the UN embargo on arms, poverty, border porosity, state services corruption, failing governance, impunity and the continuous exploitation of natural resources by foreign armies.⁸

Responsibility for the proliferation of weapons in DRC can be attributed to several key players, including the Rwandan and Ugandan Governments; the Kinshasa government which played a key role in the proliferation of arms, especially in the East; rebel forces and armed groups; international arms dealers; cross border movements and alliances between armed groups in the region; networks involving officers of the *Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo* (DRC armed forces); and the international community which took too long to impose an arms embargo in the DRC.

WEAPONS IN CHILDREN'S REACH

Some studies state that the "availability of small arms is without question a contributing factor to the use of child soldiers".⁹ In South Kivu, controlled by the *Rassemblement Congolais Démocratique* (RCD), a number of groups have used children. The Mudundu 40 militias, operational in Walungu, Kabare and Mwenga (but no longer in existence), reportedly enrolled over 5,000 children between 1999 and 2002. Their fate remains uncertain, following the defeat of the movement by the RCD backed by the RDF.¹⁰ According to government sources, between 20,000 and 30,000 children were recruited, sometimes forcibly, into the armed forces and armed groups mentioned above.¹¹

Assault guns such as the M16, FAL and AK-47 are very light, easy to use, do not require specific training and have been the most common weapons used by children in armed conflicts in DRC. Experts question the moral responsibility of weapons' producers and exporters when their arms are found in countries with armies that use children as soldiers. Following the end of conflict, children continue to be exposed to weapons and are often at risk of re-recruitment and enrolment in organized armed violence distinct from rebel groups.

TACKLING INTERLINKED ISSUES

Domestic and international civil society groups play an important role in combating the proliferation and use of these weapons in the DRC and a number of initiatives and networks have been created to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers.¹² However, efforts to protect children and those to control the proliferation and misuse of small arms remain largely separate.

The establishment of norms and standards, as well as coordination between programs and the development of additional measures to safeguard the security of children affected by small arms, must be put in place to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and address the use of child soldiers.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DRC GOVERNMENT

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR):

- Reinforce DDR processes without excluding children associated with armed groups or forces who have not carried weapons;
- Support programs that provide peaceful alternatives to conflict, violence and crime, reducing incentives that lead people to arm themselves;
- Take appropriate measures to prevent the recruitment of children working in brick factories and sawmills, both recruitment grounds for armed groups;

National, regional and international legislation:

- Support the ratification of international standards and the adoption of a tough global Arms Trade Treaty to stem the flow of arms to the DRC and other war zones;
- Establish and strengthen existing norms and codes of behaviour relating to the possession and use of small arms by civilians and members of the armed forces;
- Promptly ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and make the recruitment or use of children by armed forces or groups a specific offence under the DRC's civil and military penal codes;

Actions against impunity:

- Encourage the UN Security Council to reinforce the UN embargo on arms in DRC, including measures against states or individuals delivering arms to groups that use child soldiers;
- Support prosecution of perpetrators of human rights abuses, including on charges of enlistment and conscription of children;

Strengthening civil society initiatives and coordination

- Conduct further research to quantify the impact of small arms on children and to determine best practices and priorities;
- Involve ex-combatants and local communities, in particular women and children, in collection and destruction of small arms;
- Strengthen civil society initiatives, including the *Réseau Congolais d'Action sur les Armes Légères* (RECAAL) and encourage joint activities with child protection networks, including the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers.

¹ Adapted from an original text by Jean-Baptiste Safari Bagula, Coordinator of *Innovation et Formation pour le Développement et la Paix*, a member of the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers in DRC, and a human rights defender and trainer as well as researcher and analyst on peace, non-violence and conflict resolution.

² UNICEF, *No Guns, Please: We are children!*, 2001.

³ Oxfam/Control Arms, "Bullets reach DRC rebels, urgent call for Arms Trade Treaty", 16 October 2006.

⁴ *Association des Volontaires pour la Récupération des Enfants Orphelins, Abandonnés et Malnutris*.

⁵ Angola, Burundi, Chad, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

⁶ Rachel Stohl, "Targeting Children: Small Arms and Children in Conflict," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, Vol. IX, Issue 1, Spring 2002.

⁷ Spyros Demetriou, "Reducing Small Arms in the Great Lakes", *BCPR Story of the Month*, April 2002, cited in *The European Union in Small Arms Action*, op. cit.

⁸ The UNSC embargo (S/RES 1493, 28 July 2003) was limited to armed groups operating in North and South Kivu and Ituri District. UNSC Resolution 1616 of 29 July 2005 renewed the embargo and extended it to cover the entire country.

⁹ However, children can also be used as soldiers in areas where arms are in short supply. See Jo Becker, "Small Arms and Child Soldiers", workshop presentation, New York, 20 March 2001, cited in Rachel Stohl, *Putting Children First, Building a Framework for International Action to Address the Impact of Small Arms*, 2005.

¹⁰ Rwanda Defense Forces is the new name of the Rwandese Army, formerly the *Armée Patriotique Rwandaise*.

¹¹ *Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion*.

¹² The *Réseau Congolais d'Action sur les Armes Légères* (RECALL), an umbrella organization of civil society groups working on SALW issues, was established in November 2004.



CSC HIGHLIGHTS

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

Héloïse Ruaudel, with previous UN experience in Uganda and Namibia, joined the Coalition as Program Manager for the Great Lakes of Central Africa last April. **Lucia Withers** joined as Program Manager for South Asia and South East Asia in December. She was previously a researcher and campaigner at Amnesty International, working mainly on Indonesia and Timor-Leste, and also worked in Kabul for the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

The International Secretariat launched the Armed Groups Project in January 2006 to consolidate its work on non-state armed groups and the involvement of children in armed conflict. In July, the Coalition organized a Forum on Armed Groups and the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, in Céligny, Switzerland, to exchange views and strategies in relation to armed groups with a wide variety of individuals, groups and agencies.

To access the documents prepared for the Forum, including an overview of approaches to influence armed groups, plus case studies and a bibliography, please see: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/armedgroups>. A report on the Forum will shortly be available in English, Spanish and French.

THE COALITION IN SOUTH EAST ASIA

By Ryan Silverio, South East Asia Regional Coordinator

Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB) published new research on child soldiers in Burma, based on interviews with more than 50 children recruited by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) who had fled to the Thai border. HREIB and other international organizations held talks with the leaders of the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) aimed at obtaining a deed of commitment on the non-recruitment and involvement of children in armed conflict by these armed groups.

In May and August, women and youth from

Bangsamoro communities in Mindanao, The Philippines, participated in workshops on international human rights and humanitarian standards, organized by the South East Asia Coalition (SEACSUCS) and others. They will be followed up by further training sessions in 2007, focussing on teaching methodologies and techniques used in popular education.

The Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers conducted awareness raising campaigns to develop partnerships with youth groups and students in the area of prevention of child recruitment.

In September, SEACSUCS organized a round table on the creation of an ASEAN commission on the protection and promotion of the rights

of children and women.

SEACSUCS began a research project to identify existing organizations and programs implementing demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDR) programs for children involved in armed conflict in Indonesia, Burma and The Philippines, as part of a wider DDR mapping project undertaken by the Coalition.

The biennial Regional Steering Committee was held in Manila, The Philippines, where a new action plan was adopted with a strong emphasis on capacity building, monitoring and research, and community-based education for local partners and networks.

THE COALITION IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

By Héloïse Ruaudel, Program Manager

There have been some staff changes in the region this year. **Laure Malchair** (laure.malchair@mem.it) started as the regional consultant for the International Secretariat in August. In Burundi, **Chantal Niyokindi** (chniyokindi@yahoo.fr) from Ligue Iteka is the new National Coalition coordinator, assisted by the local NGO Libejeun. In Uganda, **Godfrey Orach Otobi** (cpauganda@yahoo.com) from the Concerned Parents Association is the new National Coordinator. Save the Children in Uganda continues to host the regional consultant and to provide support. New Program Manager Héloïse Ruaudel visited the region in June to meet with all partners and reinforce the coordination structure of national networks.

In October, members of the Coalition's international secretariat and the Coordinator for the DRC Coalition met with the French Collective against the Use of Child Soldiers, the Fédération internationale des droits de

l'homme (FIDH), and the French Government.

In Brussels, the team was joined by the Amnesty International researcher on DRC who presented AI's latest report on child soldiers (See <http://www.amnesty.org>). Meetings were arranged with members of European Union institutions, government representatives, the World Bank, and journalists.

A regional meeting took place at the end of November in Bujumbura, Burundi, bringing together local and international NGOs working in the region, UN representatives, and international child soldier experts.

In Burundi, the Coalition organized the screening of a documentary film on child soldiers. Around 100 members of the international NGO and donor communities, the Burundi government, and local youth, attended the sessions. In November, a one-day national debate on child soldiers took place to discuss some of these issues and the Coalition organized a training session

for NGOs on monitoring and reporting, with a specific focus on child recruitment and use.

In Uganda, at the end of August, the Coalition, child protection NGOs, UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), jointly organized a training session on monitoring and reporting on human rights violations with a focus on child rights violations.

In DRC, the Coalition has been campaigning for measures to strengthen the judiciary to bring to justice those who recruit or use children. In South Kivu, Coalition members have been monitoring and reporting on the recruitment and use of child soldiers and assessing issues surrounding prevention and reinsertion. NGOs will receive training on monitoring and reporting following the presidential elections held in November and the Coalition will undertake further advocacy with the new government for the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

THE COALITION IN WEST AFRICA

By Enrique Restoy, Program Manager

The Coalition has consolidated its presence in West Africa throughout 2006. The West Africa Project Manager produced a survey on child soldiers and child DDR programs in West Africa and co-produced a "Call for Action" on child soldiers with the Program for West Africa at Save the Children Sweden. Both documents are available at: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/resources/themed-reports>.

The survey was used as the basis for advocacy trips to West Africa, North America and Europe. The Coalition's work has focused

mainly on stressing the difficulties for the reintegration of former child soldiers in post-conflict Sierra Leone and Liberia, where thousands of children used during the conflicts demobilized themselves, were re-recruited for other conflicts, or were left in situations of abuse and neglect, in some cases considerably worse than when they were child soldiers. The Coalition will focus its advocacy and capacity building efforts in Côte d'Ivoire, the only remaining armed conflict in the sub region.

The Coalition has also supported the creation of the West Africa Network of Community

Based Organizations to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, an independent organization made up of local and national NGOs, based in Freetown, Sierra Leone. These organizations have been selected by the director of the network and the Coalition, based on the West Africa Project Manager's field survey.

Guillaume Landry, the Coalition's West Africa Project Manager for the past 18 months left us in August. He did an outstanding job and we wish him all the best in his new endeavours.

THE COALITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By Enrique Restoy, Program Manager

The Middle East and North Africa Network to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers has now been dissolved and the Coalition is currently focused on two priority countries in the region: Israel/ Occupied Palestinian Territories and Lebanon.

In March, the Coalition supported a training course on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the CRC on children in armed conflict in Jericho,

Palestine, organized by DCI Palestine Section for the 25 representatives of the new Palestinian Network for Children's Rights.

The Coalition's work in the Middle East from around May 2006 was severely affected by Israel-Hezbollah attacks and the invasion of Lebanon, as well as the precarious situation in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, due to the conflict between the new Hamas-led government in Palestine and Israel, and the blockage of all aid to Palestine imposed by

the European Union.

Fadi Abi Allam, chairman of the Lebanese organization Permanent Peace Movement and a long-time member of the MENA Network, was invited to coordinate a new information-sharing network on the involvement of children in armed conflict in the Middle East and North Africa. The Coalition will link up with this new network to carry out specific projects with some of its members in the future.

THE COALITION IN LATIN AMERICA

The International Coalition supported international advocacy efforts by the Colombia Coalition (Coalico), including a mission to Geneva in May 2006 to present an alternative report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in time for the CRC's session on Colombia. The alternative report focused on issues such as the continuing use of children by armed opposition groups; military indoctrination and training of children; general impunity in the

demobilization of paramilitaries; and lack of information on children demobilized by these groups. The CRC included some of these points in its Final Observations, in particular the military indoctrination of children and their use in intelligence by the Colombian Government.

Coalico also participated in a seminar on UN Security Council Resolution 1612 organized by the Canadian Permanent Mission in New

York in July 2006 and met members of the UNSC and other UN bodies. Coalico is part of the country task force of the UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, created in November 2005, even though Colombia is not part of the first phase of implementation (countries in Annex 1 plus Sri Lanka and Nepal) and has not been included in Annex I of the Secretary General's Report to the UN Security Council.

THE COALITION IN EUROPE

By Martin Nagler, Europe Outreach Officer

The Coalition first established a presence in Brussels in August 2005 to systematically lobby the institutions of the European Union (EU) to include the issue of child soldiers in their policies and programming. Since then we established regular contacts with the Commission, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament.

The Coalition lobbied for a meaningful review

of the EU Guidelines on children in armed conflict at the end of 2005 and worked with the Austrian EU presidency on the implementation of the guidelines in the first half of 2006. The EU has also developed a checklist to integrate the protection of children affected by armed conflict into European Security and Defence Policy operations and missions with military and civilian components, like those currently on the ground in DRC.

The Coalition started a series of activities that aim to bring the EU closer to other regional coalitions, as well as bringing regional partners to Europe to advocate in Brussels and other European capitals. In May the Europe Outreach officer went to The Philippines to build capacity within the SEA Coalition on EU lobbying and develop contacts between EU Member States embassies and the EC delegation in Manila and Coalition partners.



Children in organized armed violence should not be seen simply as juveniles. Risk factors believed to influence children's and youths' decisions to join armed gangs are similar to those influencing child soldiers, including poverty, low education levels and lack of economic options. Lessons from the successful treatment of children and youth in organized armed violence might be beneficial to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes for child soldiers in armed conflicts, and vice-versa.

16 year-old with 9mm calibre pistol, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

© Luke Dowdney

CHILDREN IN ORGANIZED ARMED VIOLENCE

By Rebeca Pérez and Clarissa Huguet, COAV International Project – Viva Rio

Every day we can find newspaper articles referring to criminal gangs, organized crime groups, *maras* or *pandillas* in both developing and developed countries. Although the media and the political and social communities insist on treating individuals who are actively involved in organized armed violence as common delinquents, this view does not accurately reflect reality.

The question we must ask ourselves is are children and adolescents involved in organized armed violence “just” juvenile delinquents and the answer is no. They cannot be treated the same way as juveniles because they belong to a different violent reality, are subjected to a specific command structure, are paid a salary and belong to organized groups that have a strong hierarchical system which they have to respect.

During the 1990s, a similar question arose regarding the case of child soldiers. Graça Machel was asked by the UN Secretary General to carry out research on the impact of armed conflicts on children. Her report emphasized the abuses and human rights violations they usually suffered, as well as the lack of access to basic resources. It was a benchmark in the struggle for the recognition of the plight of children employed as soldiers. The international community finally understood

that girls and boys involved in armed conflicts as soldiers are first and foremost victims of constant abuse even if they may, at times, also perpetrate abuses themselves.

Children in diverse regions of the world such as South and Central America, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Balkans and parts of the African continent are exposed to serious “risk factors” including impoverished socio-economic contexts, high unemployment rates, fragile governments, and lack of access to sanitary and educational systems. The situation of insecurity and high levels of violence, due in part to state corruption, as well as the lack of consolidation of post-war rehabilitation processes, uncontrolled circulation and presence of small arms and light weapons, and networks of drug and person trafficking, all serve to worsen the context in which this reality is breaking out.

For instance, when comparing the danger posed by gunfire to minors in Rio de Janeiro with that of recognized conflict situations, the seriousness of Rio's situation is starkly apparent. As a result of the conflict between Israel and Palestine over the Occupied Territories, 467 Israeli and Palestinian minors were killed between December 1987 and November 2001.¹ During the same period, in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro alone,

3,937 under 18s were killed due to small arms-related injuries.²

A historical absence of policing and an almost total lack of socio-economic investment in poor areas has left a power vacuum and opened the way for factions to assume the role of social ordering within the community, traditionally held by the state.³ High levels of police corruption and repressive policing have led to a spiral of violence between these sides and failed to deal with the socio-economic problems that have led many children and young people to choose the drug trade as the ‘best’ of bad options.

CHILD SOLDIERS VERSUS “URBAN CHILD SOLDIERS”

Despite the similarities between these concepts, categorizing children involved in organized armed violence as “child soldiers” would be problematic as many of the countries in which this phenomenon is observed are not in a state of war.

“Urban Child Soldiers” are children and youth employed or otherwise participating in Organized Armed Violence⁴ where there are elements of a command structure and power



over territory, local population or resources. Organized armed groups include institutionalized street gangs, *maras* and *pandillas*, drug factions, ethnic militias, *vigilantes* and even paramilitary groups acting in non-war scenarios.

Furthermore, categorizing these children as 'soldiers' may result in the legitimization of the already high levels of lethal state force used against them. There are also many similarities between child and youth members of drug factions and members of gangs in urban centres within the United States and elsewhere. However, the command structures, levels of armed confrontation, territorial domination and power over the local population found amongst many organized armed groups are a far cry from traditional notions of "adolescent peer groups" found in the US. Furthermore, children provided with war-grade weapons and paid a salary to carry firearms for a drug faction in Rio de Janeiro favela, for a Civilian Volunteer Organization in a village in rural Philippines, or for an ethnic-militia in the Niger Delta in Nigeria seem worlds apart from the traditional understanding of "juvenile delinquency".

Despite similarities, definitions such as "child soldiers" or "delinquents" fail to correctly represent the growing number of children and youth around the world that engage in organized armed groups that function outside traditionally defined war zones.

SMALL ARMS AND CHILDREN IN ORGANIZED ARMED VIOLENCE (COAV)

The unchecked proliferation of illicit small arms and the easy access to inexpensive light weapons within poor communities across the world has exacerbated the levels of gun violence in those communities, and increasingly exposed younger children to guns on a daily basis. Attention must be drawn to the devastating consequences that the circulation of small arms and light weapons has had on the growth of organized armed violence since the 1980s and its subsequent effect on children, many of whom end up losing their childhood and lives to violence, abuse and the violations of their basic human rights.

With less than three percent of the world's population, Brazil accounts for 11 percent of the world's firearm deaths. Rio de Janeiro's annual death toll from violent crime is so high that it at times exceeds the conflict-related death toll in Colombia, where a high intensity civil war has been waged for many years.

In the period from 1978 to 2000, an estimated 39,000 conflict-related deaths occurred in Colombia.⁵ During the same period in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, 49,913 firearm fatalities were reported.⁶ Approximately 70 percent of these deaths were the result of so-called drug factions, or drugs gangs. It is estimated that between 50 and 60 percent of drug faction members in the city are minors. The types of small arms and light weapons employed by all sides in the daily conflicts between rival factions and the police in Rio de Janeiro, as well as those used by paramilitary groups and militias in other regions, are also found in many civil wars and related conflicts.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Governments have tended to focus on repressive tactics to deal with children and youth in organized armed violence. Government repression may occur via legislation that singles out youth groups or their members; repressive and increasingly militarized policing; or detention and imprisonment of members of armed groups or their summary execution.

Security forces that focus exclusively on repression tend to be ineffective since they do not deal with the root causes of the problem, while juvenile justice and penal systems in most countries affected by the phenomenon are inadequate, actually worsening the problem. Moreover, armed groups tend to become better organized and increasingly violent when faced only with repressive tactics.

To effectively address the emerging phenomenon of children and youth in organized armed violence requires new legislation at national, regional and international levels; definition and categorization of children in organized armed violence; and the establishment of proactive measures like programs of prevention, treatment and rehabilitation with the affected communities.

A recent study has shown that children's responses to joining local armed groups vary widely, despite facing the same external risk factors.⁷ While some children are more vulnerable than others to pressures to join

these groups, the study maintains that in the long-term, macro risk factors must be eliminated in order for the problem to be successfully eradicated. However, strengthening existing local interventions to build up resilience amongst children and young people can be used successfully in the short term so that they choose to leave or not join the armed groups that dominate their areas.

Prevention and rehabilitation projects and programs for children associated with armed violence are successful when they are able to give children and youth the ability to respond to external risk factors through options that do not involve participation in an armed group. In addition to providing sufficient options, really successful projects also provide important influences for children, in the form of mentors for example, that further facilitate their decision to actively respond to risk factors without joining a local armed group.

"The situation [of children in organized armed violence] must be understood as an urgent call for action, not only because we need to contain the violence of armed youth groups, but because every child and adolescent needs to have his or her rights fully respected."

Paulo Pinheiro, Independent Expert, UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children⁸

¹ Statistics supplied by the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories.

² Provided by DATASUS – Ministério de Saúde, Secretaria da Saúde do Governo do Estado do Rio de Janeiro.

³ Known as the 'law of the favela'.

⁴ Also known as COAV: Children and youth in Organised Armed Violence.

⁵ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI.

⁶ DATASUS, op. cit.

⁷ Such as poverty, lack of economic options due to low levels of education and high unemployment, social marginalization, prejudice, racism, low self-esteem, violence from state forces and rival groups, family problems, lack of leisure facilities, and nothing to do. Dowdney, Luke, *Neither War nor Peace: International comparisons of children and youth in organised armed violence*, Rio de Janeiro: Viva Rio, 2005. p. 75, www.coav.org.br, p. 86, Table 2.1, "External Risks and Influences".

⁸ Dowdney, Luke, *Neither War nor Peace*, op. cit., Foreword.

Armed pandilleros, Honduras.

© Jha Ja, 2004 / Luke Dowdney, "Neither War nor Peace", 2005



ACTION APPEAL

SRI LANKA:

CALL FOR A UN HUMAN RIGHTS MONITORING MISSION AND INVESTIGATION OF ALL CHILD RECRUITMENT.¹

Children, mostly aged 14 to 18, continue to be recruited as soldiers in Sri Lanka in violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is calling for the urgent creation of a UN human rights monitoring mission and for all cases of child recruitment to be investigated.

The Coalition issued a statement on 3 October 2006, deploring the continuing forced recruitment by the Karuna group, which broke away from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in March 2004. UNICEF had documented 194 cases of child recruitment by the Karuna group as of November 2006. In a recent and disturbing development, evidence has emerged of the complicity of elements of the government military and police forces in abductions and forced recruitment by the Karuna group.

THE USE OF CHILDREN AS SOLDIERS BY THE LTTE

The LTTE has recruited and used children, some as young as nine, as soldiers throughout the Sri Lankan civil war. The average age of children at the time of recruitment into the LTTE is 15. According to latest estimates by UNICEF, 1,642 children, of which 667 are still under 18, should have been recruited by the LTTE.

Initially, children are used as guards, cooks and helpers and then as messengers and spies. They are gradually inducted into the fighting forces, first in battlefield support functions and later in active combat. Ill-treatment of children has been reported, including beating of those who say they miss home.

Since October 2005, reports from the eastern districts – particularly Batticaloa and Trincomalee – indicate that the LTTE has undertaken large-scale training of entire villages for periods stretching from three to ten days. Some local NGOs indicate that this could help the LTTE identify cadres for future recruitment.

LTTE RECRUITMENT PATTERNS

The LTTE has in the past encouraged every

family to give a son or daughter to the cause and has militarized Tamil schools, sometimes for use as military training grounds.

Observers say the LTTE recruitment drive follows a cyclical pattern depending on international scrutiny. Abduction has been resorted to if the families fail to contribute their quota, and many families are known to flee to safer places to save their children from the LTTE. UNICEF and other agencies have reported a drop in recruitment from mid-2005, but there is general consensus among international and local NGOs that the drop in figures is largely due to a fall in the number of complaints made by parents as a result of increased levels of fear and is not indicative of the actual position.

There are reasons to believe that the LTTE is continuing to recruit under-age youth in territory held by them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the LTTE has been paying workers to identify and recruit children from villages and carrying on its recruitment activities in a much more targeted and organized fashion. There are indications that the LTTE is making efforts to get back in touch with its former cadres who were recruited as children: leaflets asking for meetings with former under-age recruits have been recovered by international NGOs.

RECRUITMENT BY THE KARUNA GROUP

In March 2004, the Karuna group led by the commander of the Eastern Province, V. Muralitharan, known by his *nom de guerre* Karuna, split with the LTTE. At the time, Karuna publicly declared that his opposition to the LTTE's policy of recruiting children was among the reasons for the split. However, since then the Karuna group has also been involved in the recruitment of child soldiers.

In June 2006, UNICEF publicly called for immediate action to halt the abduction and forced recruitment of children by the Karuna group. However, recent information indicates that recruitment has increased as military operations have intensified. As of November 2006, UNICEF had recorded 194 cases of under-age recruitment by the Karuna group, mostly in Batticaloa district. UNICEF estimates that the real figures may be three

times higher. Those recruited include boys as young as 15.

The fact that forcible recruitment has occurred in the vicinity of government forces, and the police have taken little or no action to prevent it, raised strong suspicions of at least acquiescence by government forces. However, more direct involvement has recently been confirmed by Ambassador Allan Rock, a United Nations advisor on children and armed conflict, who, during a mission to Sri Lanka in November 2006 found "*strong and credible evidence that certain elements of the government security forces are supporting and sometimes participating in the abductions and forced recruitment.*"²

Since then, Colonel Karuna, while denying engaging in recruitment of children, has committed to work with UNICEF on child protection and has committed to four actions: informing commanders that recruiting and using children is forbidden; training commanders on child rights; releasing any children among Karuna ranks; and giving UNICEF monitors free access to Karuna camps to ensure that there are no children there.

The government, which has repeatedly denied charges of Sri Lankan army support for Karuna and other Tamil militia opposed to the LTTE and has failed to act on earlier allegations of involvement of its security forces in recruitment of children by the Karuna group, committed to undertake immediate and thorough investigations.

LTTE LATEST COMMITMENTS ON CHILD RECRUITMENT

Ambassador Rock also expressed concern that the LTTE has not complied with its commitments under the 2003 Action Plan for Children Affected by War, the first and only formal human rights agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, to end all recruitment of children and to release children from its forces.

During Ambassador Rock's visit, the LTTE committed to work with UNICEF and to accelerate the release of children from its ranks, so as to complete this process by

1 January 2007. It additionally committed to improving the training of its military commanders on the issue of child soldiers and to enforce disciplinary measures for those who do not comply.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

Child recruitment in Sri Lanka occurs in a context of widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the armed conflict. Neither the army nor the LTTE has acted to protect civilians. The UN estimates that more than 211,000 people have been displaced in the

north and east as a result of the deterioration in security earlier this year. Both the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE have obstructed the consistent delivery of humanitarian aid to the population.

The Coalition calls on the government to act immediately to stop all recruitment of under-18s by the Karuna group and the involvement of its own forces in such practices. The Coalition also condemns ongoing child recruitment by the LTTE.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers joins the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in urging the government

and the LTTE to agree to a human rights monitoring mission, under UN auspices. The mission should include a child protection section with a mandate to actively investigate and report on cases of child recruitment by all parties to the conflict.

¹ Source: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, "Sri Lanka: Parties to the conflict must stop recruitment of children," Press statement, 3 October 2006 and Hogg, Charu Lata, "Sri Lanka: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and child recruitment," paper presented at the Forum on armed groups and the involvement of children in armed conflict, organized by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Château de Bossey, Switzerland, 4 to 7 July 2006. Both available at <http://www.child-soldiers.org>

² Statement from the Special Advisor on Children and Armed Conflict, Colombo, 13 November 2006

MODEL LETTER TO SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES:

(Your name and address)

(Date)

Dear

Children continue to be forcibly recruited by the Karuna group, which broke away from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in March 2004. Recent reports implicate elements of government security forces in supporting or participating in abductions and forced recruitment children by the group. UNICEF has recently documented 194 cases but it is believed the actual figure is higher. Child recruitment continues to occur in a context of widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the armed conflict. Neither the Sri Lankan army nor the LTTE has acted to protect civilians and both have obstructed the consistent delivery of humanitarian aid to the population. In December, Colonel Karuna said that his group would release children from its ranks, commanders would undergo training on child rights and be issued with instructions not to recruit children, and that UNICEF would be allowed access to its camps to verify that there are no children there.

While this commitment is most welcome, I am concerned that the serious situation will lead to further recruitment and use of children as soldiers and respectfully urge you to:

- Put in place effective measures to immediately stop all recruitment of under-18s by the LTTE and the Karuna group;
- Publicly issue orders to the military and the police that support or involvement in such practices is forbidden;
- Investigate all reports of forced recruitment and abduction of children into the LTTE and the Karuna group including allegations of support or involvement of elements of the government security forces, and hold those responsible to account;
- Actively protect the civilian population and allow delivery of humanitarian aid;
- Agree to a human rights monitoring mission under UN auspices that includes a child protection section with a mandate to investigate and report all cases of child recruitment.

Yours sincerely

[name and signature]

Please write to: Sri Lanka Government, His Excellency the President Mahinda Rajapaksa and Minister of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order, Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order, 15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Tel: (+94 11) 243 0860 / 0869, (+94 11) 243 0878 / 0879, Fax: (+94 11) 244 6300, Email: modmedia@slt.net, Web: www.defence.lk

Hon. Ratnasiri Wickramanayake, MP, Prime Minister and Deputy Minister of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order, Ministry of Defence, Public Security, Law and Order, 15/5, Baladaksha Mawatha, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka. Tel: (+94 11) 243 0860 / 0869, (+94 11) 243 0878 / 0879, Fax: (+94 11) 244 6300, Email: modmedia@slt.net, Web: www.defence.lk

MODEL LETTER TO THE LTTE:

(Your name and address)

(Date)

Dear

Within the ranks of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), there are reported to be 1,642 children under 18 or children who were recruited under 18, but are now 18 or above. Underage recruitment continues and the LTTE have yet to release children in accordance with its commitments under the 2003 Action Plan for Children Affected by War.

Child recruitment takes place in a context of widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties to the armed conflict. Neither the Sri Lankan army nor the LTTE has acted to protect civilians and both have obstructed the consistent delivery of humanitarian aid to the population. The LTTE has recently given assurance that it will work with UNICEF and accelerate the release of children from its ranks, in addition to providing better training for its military commanders on recruitment of children and disciplining those who do not comply.

While this commitment is most welcome, I am concerned that the serious situation will lead to further recruitment and use of children as soldiers and respectfully urge you to:

- Immediately stop all recruitment of under-18s and release all children currently in the LTTE;
- Make effective your stated commitment of not recruiting under-18s into LTTE units;
- Actively protect the civilian population and allow delivery of humanitarian aid;
- Agree to a human rights monitoring mission under UN auspices that includes a child protection section with a mandate to investigate and report all cases of child recruitment.

Yours sincerely

[name and signature]

Please write to: Peace Secretariat, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, A9 Road, Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka.

Tel: (+94 21) 228 3960, Fax: (+94 21) 228 3959,

Email: mail@ltteps.org

ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE AS ADVOCATES AND EDUCATORS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

By Ryan Silverio, Regional Coordinator, Southeast Asia Coalition

A new initiative by the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (SEACSUCS), to reach war-affected youth in the Philippines, has been well received by members of the Bangsamoro community in Mindanao, who recently received training on human rights standards. But learning has been a two-way process.

Young people have always been the victims of armed conflicts or been involved in them. Efforts to ensure that warring parties respect international human rights and humanitarian law have been mostly directed at people or groups holding leadership posts, and have benefited adults such as community leaders, military officials or leaders of armed opposition groups. Young people from conflict areas have remained at the margins, rarely receiving information vital to their own protection.

Aiming to reach war-affected youth in Mindanao, SEACSUCS decided to initiate a trainer's training workshop on human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) for young people. In May 2006, around 25 young men attended the training sessions, having been selected by the leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), an armed opposition group, and representing local organizations and communities from Maguindanao, North Cotabato and Cotabato City.

The overall objective was to encourage respect for, and compliance with, international standards, using a progressive approach that would start on raising awareness and critical understanding of various laws and programs, and would be complemented

by developing capacity and skills to educate other youth.

The workshop's program consisted of plenary discussions and small group interactions on basic human rights' laws and principles, the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols, the landmines issue, the role of young people in peace building, and child protection issues and concerns.

The sessions on child protection focused on both international and national laws, including the Optional Protocol. The facilitators stressed that both state and non-state armed groups have the responsibility to observe human rights laws and ensure the protection of children. Marco Puzon, the National Coordinator of the Philippine Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, explained that, "It's making the youth understand that if they want to be an independent Bangsamoro State, they need to develop laws and policies consistent with international legal standards".

The program included practical sessions on facilitation skills and development of training modules. Participants were asked to develop ways to disseminate what they had learned to their colleagues and later to discuss the presentations.

For most participants it was the first time they had attended a workshop on human rights and IHL. Many said that the knowledge they had gained could give them an alternative view in dealing with armed conflict, while the methodology was welcome as it allowed participants to clearly understand the content, and interaction and the exchange of opinions was highly valued.

DEALING WITH CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

There were some sensitive issues that surfaced during the workshops, particularly in relation to the involvement of children in armed conflict. Divergent and conflicting positions were expressed: some participants cited religious obligations and the need to respond to the government's injustices and oppression as reasons for the voluntary involvement of children, while others said that there were no child soldiers within their communities except child victims of war in the custody of MILF leaders.

While the workshop carried an explicit position on the issue, the facilitators designed the sessions in the form of a dialogue as they realized that imposing previously-held views was not beneficial. Frank and open discussion grounded on respect for each other's opinions and cultural background was the prevailing norm.

The exchange of different views was a learning process for both the organizers and the participants and understanding the cultural foundations of their perspectives was beneficial in order to develop more context-specific approaches in the design of future workshops.

Agreement on certain critical issues was not anticipated but the underlying interest, however, was to seek a common understanding on the need for further dialogue and interaction, and a common objective was to protect the rights of children.

Coalition member Cristina Lomojlo shares information on child rights with members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, Cotabato City, the Philippines.

© Child Soldiers Coalition/Claudia Ricca, 2005



RESPECT FOR LOCAL PARTNERS

One of the strengths of the workshop was its respect for the capacity of local groups. Such a principle had inspired members of the organizing team to mutually reinforce and support each other's interests. The workshop was intended to be a collaborative effort to establish a sense of local ownership of the project and there were close consultations with partner organizations, including during the project's conceptualization and the program's design and implementation.

Local partners and international organizations that supported the workshop included the Center for Muslim Youth Studies (CMYSI), a local youth organization based in Mindanao, the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies (IBS), the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Philippine National Red Cross and Geneva Call.

FOLLOW-UP

Encouraged by the participants' positive feedback and interest in sustaining the initiative, the organizers have planned to hold a follow-up workshop, to develop skills in the areas of facilitation, creative teaching and module development.

Participants have also expressed their interest in organizing themselves into a group called "Bangsamoro Youth Human Rights Watch," to take the lead in educating young people on human rights and IHL, as well as monitoring and reporting violations within their communities.

CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE BUILDING

The workshop in itself is not the solution to the conflict in Mindanao but has a direct impact in, and reinforces, the process of peace building, as it promotes a sense of obligation and accountability by all parties to the conflict to respect norms and standards, to protect vulnerable groups such as children, and at the very least respond to their needs to alleviate suffering. As a capacity building project, it also helps create the social capital needed to sustain the much needed development of conflict-affected Bangsamoro communities.



Children outside a playgroup run by INDER in Calasanz, a Medellín barrio in Colombia.

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COLOMBIA: PEOPLE'S SPORTS SCHOOLS

By Claudia Ricca, Consultant, CSC

To counteract the growing influence of paramilitary groups and drug gangs in the Medellín area of Colombia, the Colombian Institute of Sports and Recreation (INDER) has established People's Sports Schools (*escuelas populares de deportes*, EPDs) in marginal areas. The EPD is a municipal program aimed at children between the ages of 6 and 18 and contributing through sports to "their integral development as human beings, strengthening their socialization and teaching them principles such as peaceful cohabitation, the culture of citizenship, non-violence, using leisure time appropriately and developing [meaningful] life projects."

The sports schools offer popular sports such as football, basketball, volleyball and swimming, as well as activities such as athletics, tennis, chess, orienteering, synchronized swimming, skating, cheerleading, karate and baseball. The program is financed through municipal funds and targeted at 22,000 people, 58 percent of whom are boys and men. INDER social workers and sociologists supervise the

EPDs encouraging parents to share play activities and craft workshops with their children while helping strengthen family bonds and break isolation.

INDER teachers also work with youngsters to change antisocial attitudes and promote solidarity and respect for others. They have also recently established a "parents' school" where adults can get advice on family issues such as domestic violence, drug abuse and sex education. EPDs have also given youngsters known to have links to the paramilitaries the chance to try something new. INDER teachers act as community mediators between youngsters when conflict arises.

For Álvaro Córdoba, an adviser working at INDER's headquarters, "sports and recreation must be used as a gateway to talk to children and youngsters about their rights – not only their right to recreation, but all child rights."

Source: INDER Medellín, Programa Escuelas Populares del Deporte, <http://www.inder.gov.co/> and interviews by Child Soldiers Coalition, February 2006

PREVENTION

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (Optional Protocol) aims to end the use of child soldiers by asking state parties to introduce legislative, administrative and other measures to prevent and punish the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reviews state party reports and makes recommendations to improve implementation of the Protocol.

INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

By October 2006, 122 states had signed and 110 states had ratified the Optional Protocol. The number of countries legally recruiting children under the age of 18 years into its armed forces has significantly reduced since the Optional Protocol was adopted.

Following the entry into force of the Optional Protocol in their territory, state parties must submit within two years a report to the CRC providing comprehensive information on the measures it has taken to implement its provisions. After considering each state party report, the Committee produces a List of issues and Concluding observations that are useful in highlighting positive developments and drawing attention to issues which were not adequately addressed in the reports.

AREAS OF CONCERN

Based on 11 Initial reports presented to the CRC at the beginning of 2006², a number of concerns have arisen. The content and depth of individual reports varied widely. Some state parties appeared to interpret the Optional Protocol as only relevant for countries engaged in armed conflict. This overlooks the need for legislative and other mechanisms to protect children from involvement in armed conflict to be in place prior to the eruption of conflict. Equally important, domestic legislation and implementation of the Optional Protocol provide standards for other countries to emulate. Meaningful consultation with civil society, including relevant NGOs and international agencies, in the drafting of the report appears to have been the exception rather than the rule.

The implementation of national and international legislation against the use of child soldiers provides standards for other countries to emulate and supports a global prohibition on child recruitment and use

VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT SAFEGUARDS

The Optional Protocol requires safeguards to be in place to ensure that the recruitment of under-18s is genuinely voluntary. While the majority of the reports indicated that such minimum safeguards were in place, disaggregated data on under-18s in the armed forces was often inadequate or not available. Such volunteers have usually been drawn from socially disadvantaged groups with limited opportunities for education and employment.

MILITARY RECRUITMENT OF UNDER-18S

Several reports did not provide sufficient information on domestic legislation to prohibit and criminalize the recruitment of under-18s by third parties or the prosecution of a person present on its territory who has allegedly recruited or used under-18s in an armed conflict in another country. The Committee also raised the question of the exact rules and procedures in place to govern the apprehension of under-18s during hostilities – including as prisoners of war – in situations where state parties have armed forces deployed in third countries.³

ASYLUM PROCEDURES FOR FORMER CHILD SOLDIERS

None of the reports reviewed referred to the particular plight of refugee or migrant children who had been involved in armed conflict before leaving their home countries. Similarly, no reference was made to the special vulnerability of internally displaced children to recruitment. These children unquestionably represent one of the highest risk groups for recruitment into armed groups.

DDR PROGRAMS

Very little information was available on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programs. Those reporting countries that have been involved in armed conflict, and as a result have former child soldiers among their citizens, have failed to provide detailed information on their activities to provide adequate assistance for the physical and psychological recovery, as well as social integration of these youths. Other state parties have reported on the bilateral and/or multilateral technical cooperation and financial assistance they have extended to other countries in this regard.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, state parties provided scant information on the different ways they have ensured the effective implementation and enforcement of the Optional Protocol within their respective countries. More innovative measures should be found to facilitate the latter, ensuring a transparent process and meaningful monitoring. Young people themselves must participate actively in this process.

¹ This article is a summary of research carried out by Elisabeth Janz Mayer-Rieckh for the Coalition in May 2006. It was edited by Claudia Ricca.

² Andorra, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, El Salvador, Finland, Italy, New Zealand, and Switzerland. All Committee documents can be found on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org>.

³ CRC, List of issues, UN Doc. CRC/C/OPAC/CAN/Q/1, 9 February 2006 (Canada), and UN Doc. CRC/C/OPAC/SLV/Q/1, 9 February 2006 (El Salvador).