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ISSUE 11/MAY 2004

CHILDSOLDIERS newsletter



A newsletter produced by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers,
with the support of the Human Security Program at Foreign Affairs Canada

EASY TO FORGET, EASY TO EXCLUDE

In places like Sri Lanka and Sierra Leone, thousands of children who were used as soldiers have returned to their families and communities and may hope for a better future. Many others, even in those countries where the war is just over or DDR programs are in place, will still be excluded and abandoned.

In this issue, we approach some of these children. We report on girl mothers formerly associated with armed groups who now face stigma and rejection from their communities. And refugee children from Myanmar, who fled a country which refuses to admit that they were used as soldiers; and are now in Thailand, which denies their refugee status.

Exclusion from society begins when a boy or a girl is drawn into an army or armed group, cut off from family, friends and community and deprived of his or her most basic rights. This exclusion may repeat itself at the end of a conflict, when a child soldier is demobilised. Sometimes, they choose not to join demobilisation and reintegration programs from fear or ignorance; mostly, however, it is the formulation of those programs or their implementation that leave them out.

It is crucial that both governments and opposition groups specifically tackle the problem of all children who are involved in their armies and armed groups – including as messengers, porters, cooks and sexual slaves. All these children must be considered in peace negotiations and demobilization plans, and not only combatants.

Responsibility for effective reintegration also lies with the international community and donors involved in funding and implementing DDR programs. This issue of the newsletter addresses two major players in this arena: the UN Security



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Role play representing reintegration stage of DDR in Malual Kon, southern Sudan. Thousands of children are still used as soldiers by various armed groups in southern Sudan.

Council and the European Union. It urges them to intensify their efforts to ensure that all children associated with armed groups are identified and included in their programs.

Despite some successes in demobilizing children involved in armed conflict, thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, are still being used in conflicts in most regions of the world. This issue takes another look at current estimates of the numbers involved; because the largest group of children excluded from society and deprived of their rights, are those who are still in the ranks of armed groups.

UNITED STATES: DESPITE RELEASES, CHILDREN STILL HELD AT GUANTÁNAMO

The United States released three children from detention at Guantánamo Bay on 29 January 2004. Human Rights Watch (HRW) welcomed the release, but cautioned that other children were still detained at the US naval base in violation of international legal standards.

"The United States is doing the right thing by returning three former child soldiers home for rehabilitation", said Jo Becker, Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch. "But other child soldiers are still detained in Guantánamo. They are also entitled to rehabilitation and special protection, but aren't getting it". The US Department of State confirmed that an unspecified number of children, aged 16 and 17, were also detained in Guantánamo. (Source: Human Rights Watch, 29/01/2004)

COLOMBIA: WATCHLIST REPORT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The Watchlist on Children in Armed Conflict published a report entitled: "COLOMBIA: Exploitation of Young People in Armed Conflict, Drug Trafficking and Small Arms Proliferation" in February 2004. The report details how children in Colombia have been marked as targets for killing and maiming, used as informants, driven from their homes and deprived access to humanitarian assistance and education by guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, government armed forces and the national police.

The report includes urgent recommendations to guerrilla groups and paramilitaries, to the UN system, in particular the Security Council, and the Governments of Colombia and the United States.

(Source: Watchlist, www.watchlist.org, 19/02/2004)

POPE CONDEMNS USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

Pope John Paul II decried the use of child soldiers in world conflicts on 28 March 2004, saying they were victims twice over and were overwhelmed by "the hatred of adults." John Paul made the comments in his weekly Sunday appearance to pilgrims and tourists in St. Peter's Square.

He said children around the world were victims of sickness, AIDS and hunger - as well as a "horrible form of violence" in which they are enlisted as child soldiers. "They undergo a scandalous double aggression: They are made victims and at the same time protagonists of war, overwhelmed in the hatred of adults," John Paul said.

(Source: AP, 29/03/2004)

UGANDA: SEXUAL VIOLENCE RISING AMONG NIGHT COMMUTERS

Thousands of girls are among the children who flee their homes each night to seek shelter in town centres fearing abduction and forced recruitment by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. According to the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (WCRWC), girls increasingly report harassment and sexual abuse mainly from youths and government soldiers. The WCRWC stated that "without adequate security, adolescent girls and women are forced to choose between their fear of an LRA attack at home and their fear of rape during the nightly flight into town". "Young night commuters face an increased risk of HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy as a result of sexual violence or unprotected sex", WCRWC said.

(Source: New Vision, Kampala, 24/02/2004)

OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES: ISRAEL ARRESTS 14-YEAR-OLD WOULD-BE SUICIDE BOMBER

Israeli troops arrested on 24 March 2004 an alleged 14-year-old Palestinian suicide bomber at Hawara check point in the West Bank, after taking off his explosives vest at gunpoint, the Israeli army said.

Hussan Abdu's surrender was televised internationally. Sky Television aired footage showing Abdu removing his shirt and then the bulky vest, which had a detonator wire hanging from it, as soldiers and Palestinian passers-by watched from behind the concrete barricades. There was no claim of responsibility for Abdu's mission by any Palestinian armed group. (Source: Reuters, 24/03/2004)

SRI LANKA: FEAR OF RE-RECRUITMENT BY TAMIL TIGERS

The International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers urged on 22 April the Sri Lankan-based armed group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), to end confusion and state clearly that it would not re-recruit any of the children released in previous weeks. Despite pledges to end the use of child soldiers, the Coalition received numerous reports that vans had been circulating in the Batticaloa-Amparai districts in the east and announcing over loud speakers that all former cadres must register for re-recruitment.

Coalition sources said that many former child soldiers were living in fear of re-recruitment. They and their families also feared reprisals if they tried to avoid returning to the LTTE. Media reports said that those who did not register would be "considered traitors".

LTTE forces on April 9 defeated a breakaway group under their former eastern commander, known as Karuna. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), at least two child soldiers, both girls, died in the fighting. Over the previous two weeks several hundred child soldiers left the LTTE following the disbanding of the Eastern regional command, partly as a result of increased pressure by parents demanding the return of their children. (Source: CSC, 22/04/2004)

SUDAN:

SPLA/M BEGINS DEMOBILISING CHILD SOLDIERS IN UPPER NILE

The rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) begun to demobilise a large number of child soldiers in the volatile western Upper Nile region of the south in January 2004, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

UNICEF has supported the demobilisation of child soldiers throughout southern Sudan since 2000. The agency, which also supported the establishment of a special task force by the rebel movement to demobilise children in their ranks, said it had helped in the demobilisation of about 12,000 SPLA/M children since it started operating in late 2001.

The agency added that the task force hoped to demobilise all children in the SPLA/M before the signing of a peace agreement to end the 20-year conflict with the government. It stated, however, that about 2,500 children would "for the time being" remain in the SPLA/M even after the western Upper Nile demobilisation was complete, many of them in areas that remain insecure.

(Source: IRIN, 23/01/2004)

LIBERIA:

CHILDREN AMONG MODEL AND LURD DISARMING FIGHTERS

The United Nations re-launched a program to disarm an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 former combatants in Liberia on 15 April 2004. On the first day, a total of 255 fighters handed their weapons at a special cantonment site set up in the former stronghold of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel movement. Among them there were 35 child soldiers.

The LURD signed a peace agreement with the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and the Liberian Government in 2003, ending 14 years of near constant civil war. The United Nations made a false start to the programme in early December 2003, when hoards of gunmen loyal to former president Charles Taylor rioted on the street of Monrovia, firing shots and demanding cash for handing in their weapons.

Men, women and child fighters from MODEL lined up peacefully to hand in their weapons on 20 April 2004 as the UN peacekeepers opened a second disarmament camp in the port city of Buchanan. "I gave my guns because I do not want to fight anymore", said M.S., a 14-year-old girl soldier who looked pleased to hand over her AK-47 assault rifle to Bangladeshi peace keepers.

(Source: IRIN, 20/04/2004)

ANGOLA:

MOVING CHILD RIGHTS UP THE AGENDA

The plight of former child soldiers and war-affected children in Angola is beginning to ease as they slowly reintegrate back into their communities, but new threats such as child trafficking and HIV/AIDS are emerging, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said on 9 April 2004.

Around 3,500 children had been reunited with their families, and 3,480, including former child soldiers, were involved in reintegration programmes. The war helped keep a lid on the disease, making Angola's prevalence rate of around five percent, far lower than many of the neighbouring countries, but 3.5 million Angolans have returned home, and the very real fear is that HIV/AIDS is also on the move.

(Source: IRIN, 9/04/2004)

AFGHANISTAN:

PROGRESS IN DEMOBILISATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) announced on 20 February 2004 that it had made progress in demobilising child soldiers in Afghanistan. The child soldier demobilisation effort targets the estimated 8,000 former child soldiers, many of whom have already left the fighting forces informally over the past year.

Over the past 23 years of conflict in Afghanistan, thousands of children have been used by warlords and fighting forces. While hundreds of these had been identified, some 150 were demobilised in four districts of the northern city of Konduz since the demobilisation program began in early February.

(Source: IRIN, 20/02/2004)

SIERRA LEONE:

DISARMAMENT AND REINTEGRATION COMPLETED AFTER FIVE YEARS

Sierra Leone completed in February 2004 a five-year programme to disarm and reintegrate more than 70,000 combatants who took part in the country's civil war. President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah wound up the process by officially dissolving the National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR) at a ceremony on 3 February.

Francis Kaikai, Executive Secretary of the NCDDR, said that after disarming 72,490 fighters and demobilising 71,043, including 6,845 child soldiers, he was "no longer aware of any illegal armed groups posing a threat to the state of Sierra Leone."

Alan Doss, head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Sierra Leone said however: "The DDR is over, but reintegration and reconciliation must go on under a different banner (...) the ex combatants have joined another, larger army of young people who are seeking gainful employment (...) this is a real challenge for post-conflict Sierra Leone"

(Source: IRIN, 4/02/2004)

BURUNDI:

DEMOBILISATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS FROM THE REGULAR ARMY

Twenty nine child soldiers, aged 13 to 18 years, who had served as porters in Burundi's regular army, were demobilised on 19 February 2004 in a ceremony in Bujumbura. Each child received a demobilisation aid package with 20 kilograms of beans, 11 kilograms of rice, soap, clothes and oil. According to the head of the army's demobilisation programme, the children would then either resume school or be trained in different crafts. A similar demobilisation operation took place in the Burundian city of Karuzi, where 22 children between the ages of 11 and 18 were released on 13 February, according to Radio Burundi.

(Source: CRIN, 19/02/2004)

SECURITY COUNCIL TAKES NEW ACTION ON CHILD SOLDIERS

By Jo Becker¹

On 22 April, the United Nations Security Council adopted its strongest measures to date in addressing the continued recruitment and use of child soldiers around the world. The Council acted in response to a report from the Secretary-General that specifically listed 54 governments and armed groups in 15 countries that recruit or use children in violation of international obligations. In that report, issued on 20 November 2003, the Secretary-General stated that despite some positive developments, the situation for children on the ground remained “grave and unacceptable.”

In situations on the Security Council's agenda², including Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, the DRC, Liberia and Somalia, the Council called on parties to prepare within three months concrete action plans to end all illegal recruitment and use of child soldiers. It stated that failure to develop or implement such plans could result in the imposition of targeted measures, such as bans on the supply or export of small arms or other military assistance.

The Council also called on the Secretary General to establish effective follow-up at the country level, by naming a focal point to conduct dialogue with governments and armed groups using child soldiers and help develop the action plans. This focal point is expected to consult with all stakeholders at country level to review progress and to report to the Secretary General by 31 July 2004.

Lobbying by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers helped prompt these actions. In the weeks leading up to the Security Council's 20 January 2004 debate on children and armed conflict, the Coalition, together with the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, met with Security Council members, including the UK, USA, Russia, France, Philippines, China, Germany, Spain, and Brazil, and gave a briefing to the full Council during an informal meeting. The Coalition advocated strong steps by the Council to demand accountability for the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and more effective implementation of previous resolutions. The steps taken by the Council—including the establishment of specific deadlines for the creation of action plans, the

designation of country focal points to carry out dialogue with the groups, and specifying targeted measures in cases of noncompliance—were among the Coalition's key recommendations.

The Coalition had also urged the Council to continue to focus on other situations not on its agenda, but where child soldier use is widespread. In his report, the Secretary-General had listed governments and armed groups in Burma, Chechnya, Colombia, Nepal, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda. None of these situations are formally on the Security Council's agenda. However, negotiations on a new resolution were thrown off-track when both the United Kingdom and Russian Federation made formal appeals to the Secretary-General regarding the listing of groups in Northern Ireland and Chechnya. The respective governments did not dispute the recruitment of children, but in each case, claimed that the situation was not an armed conflict. In a very controversial move, opposed by the Coalition and several UN agencies, the Secretary-General eventually issued “corrigendum” in both cases, stating that neither Northern Ireland nor Chechnya were “armed conflicts within the meaning of the Geneva Conventions or their additional protocols thereto.”

The dispute regarding Northern Ireland and Chechnya raised concerns about the criteria used by the Secretary-General for listing governments and armed groups in situations not on the Security Council agenda. As a result, the Council took little action regarding these actors. The Coalition had pushed for the same measures—including deadlines for action plans, appointment of focal points, continuing dialogue, and possible sanctions—to apply to all parties that recruit or use child soldiers, regardless of whether or not they are on the Security Council's agenda. While the Council called on these parties to end their recruitment and use of children, and signaled its intention to consider further steps in the future, its only concrete action was to request a further report by the Secretary-General by 31 October 2004 on compliance and progress made by all parties mentioned in his previous report.

During the Council's 20 January 2004 debate

on children and armed conflict, nearly all members of the Council explicitly addressed the issue of child soldiers. Many clearly endorsed the Secretary-General's list of violators as a critical tool in demanding accountability by governments and groups that use child soldiers and called for targeted measures against parties that did not show improvement. Some members of the Council highlighted the need for stronger monitoring and reporting on abuses against children in armed conflict. In its 22 April resolution, the Council requested that the Secretary-General develop within three months, an action plan for a systematic and comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism to provide “timely, objective, accurate and reliable information” on the recruitment and use of child soldiers and on other abuses committed against children affected by armed conflict to inform its future actions. The Council stated that such a mechanism should utilize expertise from NGOs and civil society, as well as the United Nations, national governments and regional organizations.

The new actions taken by the Security Council provide several challenges for the Coalition and others working to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Within just a few months, new information will need to be provided to the Secretary-General's office for his next report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict, documenting whether or not progress has been made by groups previously cited for recruiting or using child soldiers. In situations on the Security Council's agenda, NGOs and the UN must actively support the creation of plans of action to end child recruitment and be prepared to actively evaluate the plans and monitor their implementation. The Coalition should also be actively engaged in the development of the new global monitoring and reporting mechanism to ensure that the Security Council receives the information it needs to take further action in the future.

¹ Jo Becker is Children's Rights Advocacy Director for Human Rights Watch and a member of the International Steering Committee of CSC.

² To be officially placed on the Security Council's agenda, all members must agree that the situation is a threat to international peace and security, and should be considered by the Council.

Aike Tun says he is 16 years-old but looks at least two years younger. He recently arrived in a border town in Thailand, after escaping from Light Infantry Battalion 339 (LIB 339) of the *Tatmadaw*, or Myanmar (Burma) army. He was recruited at the age of 13 from a paddy field near his home in Yesagu township, Magee Division, middle Myanmar. He was asked by two men to come along to a place that was “fun” but was then handed over to an army commander in exchange for one bag of rice and 10,000 Chat (around USD 11). Over the following three years, Aike Tun was trained in military combat and forced to work for LIB 339, near the border with Thailand, building fences and traps, cooking and carrying weapons and provisions. He was lucky: he never had to fire his gun to kill or wound any others. But he was never allowed to tell his family his whereabouts and has not seen them since he was recruited. Twice he became very ill with malaria and was often beaten by his superiors.

THAILAND TIPTOES AROUND PROTECTION OF REFUGEE CHILDREN

By Claudia Ricca. Programme Officer for South East Asia. CSC

His case is not unusual. According to Human Rights Watch, there are around 70,000 child soldiers in the armed forces of Myanmar.¹ Many children are recruited by deception, threats or by force. Others volunteer due to lack of real alternatives to the poverty surrounding them.²

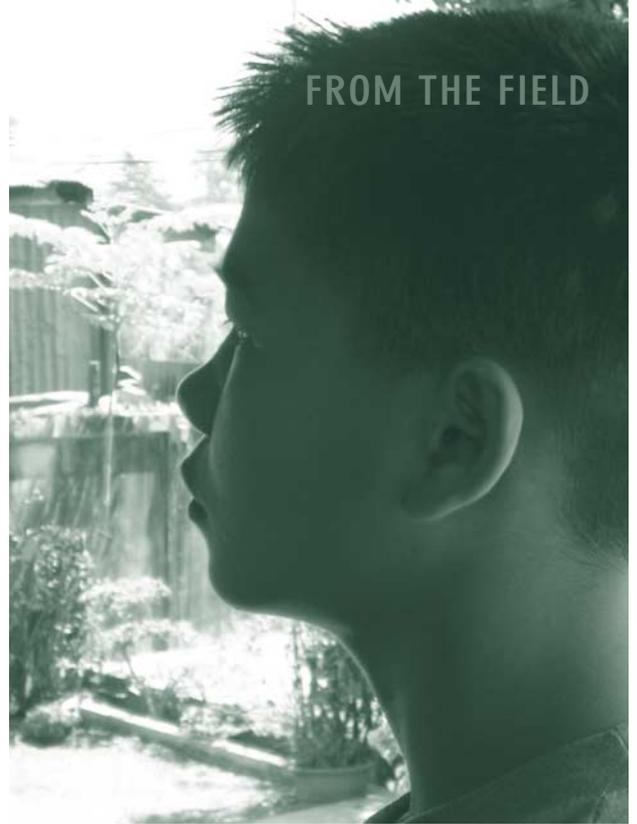
When I met Aike Tun at a safe house in March, I asked what he'd like to do now that he had escaped from the *Tatmadaw*. He replied: “I don't know, but I'm really sick of soldiers and the army.” He has only completed one year of elementary education, has no family in Thailand and is obviously apprehensive about the future.

And he should be. He has arrived in a country that does not recognise his right to become a refugee and would probably send him back to Myanmar if he was caught. Under a Memorandum of Agreement between Myanmar and Thailand, signed in June 2003, 400 people from Myanmar can be deported each month into a military-controlled holding centre in the Myanmar town of Myawaddy, across the border from Mae Sot in Thailand.³ Under this agreement, Thailand can deport *Tatmadaw* deserters back to Myanmar, where they usually face prison or execution.⁴

Moreover, other former combatants and child soldiers returned to Myanmar face the prospect of serious human rights violations by non-state actors from ethnic groups different to the returnee's own:

Thousands of people from Myanmar cross into Thailand each month, some as economic migrants and others with legitimate claims to refugee status. However, since there is no “impartial and proper screening and admission mechanisms in place to determine the claims of new asylum seekers,”⁶ all Myanmar people are considered to be illegal migrants under Thai immigration law⁷ and are “subject to regular harassment, arrest and even deportation.”⁸

Currently, “there are close to 120,000 refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border. Over 90,000 of them are from the Karen ethnic community,



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Aike Tun (not his real name), former *Tatmadaw* (Myanmar armed forces) child soldier

while over 20,000 are Karennis.”⁹ At the end of 2001, there were an estimated 250,000 Burmese living in Thailand in “refugee-like circumstances.”¹⁰

According to Refugees International, “[s]ome Karen and Karenni asylum seekers [...] are able to stay unofficially in the camps. Although some can receive assistance, others share meager living quarters and even smaller rations with relatives and friends. But other Burmese people with legitimate asylum claims are forced to live in limbo on the margins of Thai society either along the border or in urban centers.”¹¹

Since coming to power in 2001, the Thaksin administration has been seen as forging closer relations with the government in Myanmar while using harsh measures against asylum seekers in Thailand¹² and restricting

“My biggest fear was to say I was KNU [Karen National Union]. The DKBA [Democratic Karen Buddhist Army] knows that KNU refugees say bad things about DKBA. It's a big problem. If you can't answer, they ask again. Then they hit you and ask again. After that, they put you in prison, and ask again. Then they kill you. Killing is the last question for you.”

“S”, a former KNU child soldier, about meeting DKBA soldiers on being deported from Thailand in August 2003.¹



© CSC, 2004

Thai-Myanmar Friendship bridge, linking the towns of Mae Sot in Thailand with Myawaddy in Myanmar (Burma). The River bed is often dry, allowing hundreds of Burmese asylum seekers and migrants to easily cross over to Thailand.

the access of foreign journalists to the refugee camps for fear that any reports perceived as "negative" by the government in Rangoon would damage relations between both countries.¹³

The Thai government has been a key promoter of the so-called "Myanmar Roadmap," a seven-step strategy for political transition, announced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, ruling military junta) at the end of 2003, which includes the release of democratic opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the resumption of the National Convention process.

Thailand's involvement in promoting the roadmap has attracted criticism from the US and from within, with critics pointing out that while talks go on Suu Kyi and her supporters remain in detention.¹⁴ However, supporters stress that Thailand "...is trying to solve its own problem of how to stop the spillover from the Burmese internal conflict..." which includes refugees.¹⁵

Thailand has not signed the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. Until recently, representatives from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) were able to carry out refugee status determination (RSD) screening procedures and, under the UNHCR mandate, recognize individuals as refugees (called "Persons of Concern," or POCs in

insurgent groups, an acceptable settlement is an essential pre-requisite to refugee repatriation to this area."²⁰

The US has recently begun processing refugee applications from 2,000 people from Myanmar currently in urban centres in Thailand, after Thai authorities announced in 2003 that all people from Myanmar would be transferred to the border camps. The threat followed the participation of dozens of students from Myanmar in street protests against Rangoon in Bangkok.²¹ In March, the EU announced it had earmarked nearly 10 million euros (over 11 million dollars) for aid projects to help refugees from ethnic groups living along the Thai-Myanmar border.²²

By sending those fleeing persecution back to Myanmar, where their lives or liberty would be at serious risk, the Thai Government "is violating one of the fundamental principles of international law, the principle of non-refoulement,"²³ where refoulement is the forcible return of people to countries where they face persecution.²⁴

Although Thailand has yet to ratify the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, under Art. 38(4) of the Convention, it has a clear duty to protect children involved in situations of armed conflict:

Thailand must stop tip-toeing around the issue of asylum seekers from Myanmar and demonstrate its commitment to upholding international humanitarian and human rights principles, by allowing international agencies to carry out independent and thorough screening of would-be refugees, including former child-soldiers, as well as providing protection and assistance for children and their families, as established in these international standards.

Perhaps then, Aike Tun and many more like him can begin to think about the future and no longer fear the past.

Thailand).¹⁶ However, on 1 January 2004, the UNHCR suspended RSD screenings under pressure from the Thai Government.¹⁷ According to press reports, National Security Council (NSC) deputy secretary-general Prakrit Prachaonpachanuk said in March that local Thai authorities would conduct all screening procedures, with UNHCR acting as observer only.¹⁸

Human Rights Watch has said that since the suspension of RSD "...it will be much more difficult to ensure protection of Burmese in detention with valid asylum claims, especially new asylum seekers who have not yet registered with UNHCR."¹⁹

At the same time, UNHCR has continued to hold discussions with the Myanmar government on the eventual return of the refugees. In March, it put out a statement to assuage fears that repatriation would be imminent, following an agreement reached with the Myanmar government in February. In it, UNHCR stressed that "...the current situation in the states along the Burma-Thailand border [...] is not conducive to refugee returns. While discussions are currently taking place between the Burmese authorities and

"In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict."

¹ Human Rights Watch, "My Gun was as Tall as Me - Child soldiers in Burma"; N.Y.: Oct 2002, p.3.

² Human Rights Watch, "My Gun was as Tall as Me - Child soldiers in Burma"; N.Y.: Oct 2002, p. 26.

³ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 15.

⁴ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, interviews held in Bangkok in March 2004.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 17.

⁶ Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 29.

⁷ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 23.

⁸ Refugees International, Protecting Burmese Refugees in Thailand, 24 January 2003 (<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/cgi-bin/ri/bulletin?bc=00483>)

⁹ UNHCR, Burma: U.N. says refugees' return won't be easy or quick, 17 March 2004 (<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/taxis/vtx/print?tbl=NEWS&id=40597b3414>)

¹⁰ US Committee for Refugees, Country Report: Thailand, 2002 (source: http://www.refugees.org/world/countryp/asia_pacific/thailand.htm)

¹¹ Refugees International, Protecting Burmese Refugees in Thailand, 24 January 2003 (<http://www.refugeesinternational.org/cgi-bin/ri/bulletin?bc=00483>)

¹² The Nation, Burmese Refugees: UNHCR barred from giving status, 23 March 2004.

¹³ Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 23.

¹⁴ Keeping Bangkok Process on track, Bangkok Post, 21 March 2004.

¹⁵ Keeping Bangkok Process on track, Bangkok Post, 21 March 2004.

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 5.

¹⁷ Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 4.

¹⁸ The Nation, Burmese Refugees: UNHCR barred from giving status, 23 March 2004.

¹⁹ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 17.

²⁰ UNHCR, Myanmar: UNHCR reached agreement, 12 March 2004, (<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/taxis/vtx/print?tbl=NEWS&id=4051bd477>)

²¹ US may take 2,000 Burma exiles, The Nation, 22 April 2004

²² EU Gives aid for Myanmar refugees, Herald Sun, 3 March 2004.

²³ Human Rights Watch, Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Thai Policy toward Burmese Refugees and Migrants, February 2004, Vol. 16, No. 2 (C), p. 7.

²⁴ UNHCR - Can non-Convention countries refuse to admit would-be refugees?, Q&A on the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, source: www.unhcr.ch

VOICES OF YOUTH IN SOUTHERN SUDAN

By Enrique Restoy, Africa and Middle East Programme Officer. CSC

CSC was in one of the two children's workshops for the UNICEF evaluation of child soldiers programmes in Southern Sudan in February 2004, organised with the participation of Save the Children UK and Save the Children Sweden and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Thirty nine children aged 11-17 and affected by the armed conflict in Southern Sudan, including boys and girls formerly associated with the Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA), gathered in Malual Kon, Northern Bahr Al Ghazal. They used their voices and their pencils to speak their minds about their experiences and about how to prevent the participation of children in the conflict.

What a drawing can express

The children of Malual Kon are not easy to fool. At first, they look at you with defiance as waiting for those recurrent questions: Have you fought? Have you killed? They will not produce their answers as they do not know why you are asking. They prefer to use their own ways of communicating their feelings and they chose drawings, songs, stories and role plays.

When asked to make a drawing of something significant that they witnessed or lived during the war, a million feelings unfold on their notebooks. Marko draws two children in tears, and says they have been abducted by the "Arabs" (the Sudanese armed forces); Maria depicts her 14-year-old pregnant sister and writes that she was forced to marry a commander; James draws a boy in military uniform wearing a gun and running away from a soldier riding a horse. He would not say who the boy is.

"... I never knew that even we, girls, have rights"

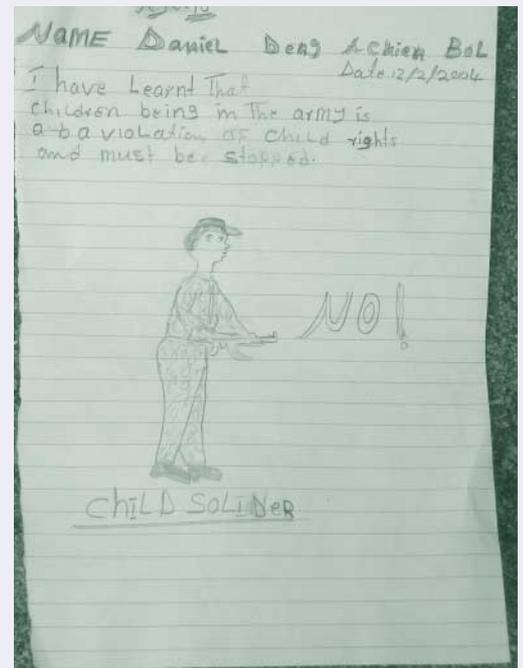
Smiles come up slowly, but they remain in their faces long as boys and girls gain confidence with each other. Girls prove to be more outspoken when talking about rights. Cynthia says: "Now that I know I also have rights, I want to go back to school, but I don't

want to be in a class with boys, they are rascals and lazy!"

At the workshop, children are given all the space they need to express their views, but they are also taught their rights. Prevention work does not stop there, and they know it. When asked to identify key players in addressing their claims, Achol replies: "My parents, they don't know I have the right not to become a soldier until I am an adult". Others pinpoint teachers, the SPLA, Omar (Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, President of Sudan), local Chiefs, John Garang (leader of the SPLM/A), military leaders, the Governor, adults, other children...

Unfulfilled promises

The children extend their arms and make funny noises with their mouths to represent how they were flown back to their families. When John is asked about the DDR program in Southern Sudan, he says: "It is good; I am free from fighting and back with my parents". Marko is more critical: "I am back with my parents, but some of my friends lost theirs and are on the streets, I know a couple who are back in the army". Deng jumps in: "We were promised clothes, food and education, and we haven't got those". The organisers of the workshop acknowledge that some of the older children are thinking about going back



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Daniel Deng Achien Bol, winner CSC drawing context in Malual Kon workshop

to the SPLA as they assume that there will be money given by donors to soldiers once the peace agreement between the SPLA and the Sudanese government is signed. They see it as the only way of paying to pursue their education (there is no secondary school in Malual Kon).

When the workshop is over, they gather together for a final picture, and most prepare themselves for a long walk back home. Hopefully, their smiles will still be there for sometime, along with pride for having been listened to as well. Yet, these children are still at risk of being actively involved in this long-lasting war and their daily lives are just as hard, as they have always been.

THE VOICES OF CHILDREN ON PREVENTION OF RECRUITMENT

Southern Sudanese children advise:

- Send all children to school
- Let children participate in the peace accords (between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement)
- Give food to children, so that they do not need to go to the military to feed themselves
- Make Government's policies on children transparent to all, especially to children
- Bring peace to our land
- Advise children not to ever join the army
- Ask religious leaders to play their part in helping prevent child recruitment
- Make schools safer, so that we are not afraid of going to school
- Train teachers and motivate them to prevent recruitment and teach us how to stay out of the army
- Keep your promises!!

ACTION APPEAL TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

CAMPAIGN FOR AN EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ON CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is concerned that the EU will fail to implement effectively its strong guidelines to protect children from the effects of armed conflict, including being recruited and used as child soldiers. Without a Special Representative, the EU Guidelines may remain a piece of paper that fails to help children caught up in war. Please join our campaign for the creation of an EU Special Representative on Children in and Armed Conflict.

Twice now, the European Union - African Caribbean and Pacific countries' Joint Parliamentary Assembly (ACP-EU JPA) has made clear requests to the EU to appoint a Special Representative for children's rights. In its October 2003 meeting in Rome, the ACP-EU JPA called for this position to be created to provide leadership within the EU. The European Parliamentarians met with their African, Caribbean and Pacific colleagues in Addis Ababa on 16-19 February 2004, calling again for such an appointment to make sure there is greater visibility for children's rights and a greater prominence for children's issues in all EU policies¹.

"We must renew our appeal to the EU Council regarding the creation of a post of Special Representative for children and armed conflict", said the co-President of the EU-ACP Joint Assembly, Ramdien Sardjoe.

With such strong demands by the elected EU parliamentarians, it seemed likely that the Special Representative post would be created. EU Foreign Ministers pledged to consider the possible appointment of an EU Special Representative in its Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, adopted in December 2003. But the EU leaders put off creating a mechanism for their implementation immediately, deciding to wait for two years to evaluate if the Guidelines have failed to protect children without such leadership.

The EU settled for a mediocre "mainstreaming" of this issue by the EU Commission staff into external, development and humanitarian assistance policies as well as crisis management operations. Past experience shows that however well-intentioned and hard-working the EU Commission staff can be, the EU Guidelines won't be effective without someone who will seize the initiative to push for serious, effective and timely implementation inside the large EU bureaucracy.

The EU Guidelines on Torture, adopted in April 2001, remain unimplemented by most EU diplomats in the field, partly because many don't even know of their existence and others don't know how to use them in their work with national authorities.

NEED FOR ACTION

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is concerned that the EU will fail to implement effectively its strong guidelines – recently adopted at the end of 2003 – to protect children from the effects of armed conflict, including being recruited and used as child soldiers. These EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict could best be implemented if there is a Special Representative appointed to ensure that the EU takes the commitments made in the Guidelines seriously. So far, EU leaders are worried about the potential cost and further demands for other Special Representatives on other human rights issues, and hope that "mainstreaming" the issue into the EU bureaucracy will be sufficient. But without a Special Representative providing leadership on the issue, the EU Guidelines may remain a piece of paper that fails to help children caught up in war.

THE OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION: THE JUNE 2004 ELECTIONS FOR THE EU PARLIAMENT

If EU parliamentarians have twice called for this position to be created, and it has not, then the EU Parliament should make this a priority issue. There will be Europe-wide elections for the European Parliament in June 2004. The Coalition aims to make the EU Guidelines' implementation an issue for these elections, and the parties that are putting forward candidates be made aware of the EU Guidelines and the need for a Special Representative to implement them.

REQUIRED ACTION

For National Coalition members and supporters in the EU: Please write letters to the leading national political parties putting forward candidates for election to the European Parliament. These letters should best be addressed to the national party officials in your country who take the lead on the issue of children's rights. See the model letter below.

For National Coalition members and supporters in Asia, Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Middle East, Central and Eastern Europe: Please raise the implementation of these Guidelines with your local EC Delegation (particularly the Head of Mission as he/she is officially targeted in the EU Guidelines on CAAC) or in those countries with conflicts with local ECHO staff as an urgent issue. Please review the model letter as background before any discussion with the Head of Mission.

MODEL LETTER

[INSERT CONTACT DETAILS]

[DATE]

Dear [Mr ~] or [Ms ~],

I am writing to you as a concerned citizen about the plight of children who are caught up in armed conflict, and particularly those children who are recruited to become child soldiers.

As you may know, the European Union has adopted EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict in December 2003 to address this issue. But despite repeated calls by both the EU Parliament and the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly, there is a mediocre plan to implement these guidelines by "mainstreaming", without any particular person to take the lead.

I am deeply concerned that these Guidelines will not effectively protect children without proper implementation through the appointment of an EU Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict to take charge of coordinating the EU work in areas of armed conflict.

On June 2004, I will be casting my vote on who will represent me as a member of the European Parliament, and your party has asked me and my fellow citizens to vote for your candidates. I ask any newly elected member of the European Parliament to act as a strong advocate of children's rights and to play a crucial role in supporting and pushing this process:

1. Ensure attention to the rights² and situation of children affected by armed conflict in its widest sense in relevant European Parliament actions, meetings and documents. Possible action includes, but is not limited to:
 - Ensuring that appropriate attention and consideration is made to the rights of all children affected by armed conflict in relevant committee meetings; in relevant country specific meetings involving Government representatives; and in EP missions to the field
 - Ensuring that appropriate attention and consideration is made to the rights and situation of children affected by armed conflict in relevant EP reports and resolutions
2. Hold the Council and the Commission accountable for serious and effective implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. Possible action includes, but is not limited to:
 - Inviting the Council and Commission to present their Annual Reports on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict in an annual hearing
 - Producing a report in response to the Annual Reports on the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict, and to ensure attention to the implementation of the Guidelines within the EU Annual Report on Human Rights in the World
 - Posing regular questions about the status of implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict to the relevant instances in the Council and Commission, inter alia, to ensure coherent approaches to the implementation of all relevant EU instruments and tools (eg. The European Security Strategy, the EU Guidelines on CAAC, and the EU commitments at the Stockholm conference on Good Donorship)
3. Support the appointment of a Special Representative/Envoy for Children and Armed Conflict. Possible action includes, but is not limited to:
 - Repeating calls for the appointment of a Special Representative/Envoy for Children and Armed conflict in relevant resolutions
 - Following up on relevant resolutions such as the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly Resolution on Children's Rights and Child Soldiers in particular (ACP-EU 3587/03/fin, October 2003), demanding oral and/or written progress report on progress in terms of Council follow up to the EP calls

I urge your party and candidates for European Parliament to endorse the EU Guidelines and – if elected -- ensure their implementation by publicly declaring your party's support for the creation of an EU Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict. I look forward to learning more about your official position on this crucial issue of children's rights.

Sincerely,

[name]

Please write to the main political parties in your country. Here are the contact details for the two main political parties in Spain, France, the United Kingdom and Germany:

Spain

Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol
infopsoe@psoe.es

Partido Popular
Madrid
Fax: +34 913192322
atencion@pp.es

France

Parti Socialiste Français
Fax: +33 1 47051578
www.parti-socialiste.fr/ecrire

Union pour un Mouvement
Populaire (UMP)
tel. : 01.40.76.60.00
Contact by email:
http://www.u-m-p.org/index.php
(section ecrivez-nous)

United Kingdom

The Labour Party
info@new.labour.org.uk
Fax: 020 7802 1234

Conservative Party
Fax: 020 7222 1135
Email: please send your appeal
through the Conservatives'
feedback page:
https://www.conservatives.com/
feedback

Germany

Socialdemokratische Partei
Deutschlands (SPD)
Ollenhauerstrasse 1
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Email: through their website -
http://www.spd.de/servlet/PB/menu/
/1009331/index.html?id=1009331
fax: +49 288 164 6800.

CDU Deutschlands
Telefax 030 / 220 70 111
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**(* For more information
about this campaign, please
refer to our web site:
www.child-soldiers.org**

¹ Text of resolution to be found at: http://www.europarl.eu.int/intcoop/acp/60_07/pdf/resolution01_en.pdf

² As set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols

KNOWN BUT INVISIBLE: GIRL MOTHERS RETURNING FROM FIGHTING FORCES

By Susan McKay, Mary Burman, Maria Gonsalves, and Miranda Worthen¹

International debate has intensified in recent years about how to better include girls in DDR programs and foster their healthy reintegration. When they leave a fighting force, girls usually have limited access and benefits from demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) programs because they are not viewed as combatants (Brett, 2003; McKay & Mazurana, 2000; McKay & Mazurana, 2004). Complicated scenarios inevitably unfold when they return because community residents may fear girls' behavior and past acts.

In this article, we highlight the issues faced by girl mothers who return from fighting forces. "Girl mothers" are girls associated with a fighting force who were under 18 years of age when their child was conceived even if they are presently older than 18 years. Girl mothers and their children are among the most vulnerable and marginalized of returning children.

Girl mothers are known but invisible: the community is aware of their presence, but they are not usually spoken about in public nor are they often targeted for specific help by humanitarian aid agencies. Girl mothers themselves do not want to self-identify for fear of stigmatization, and elders don't want the issue of girl mothers to surface because they are uncomfortable addressing it. The children of girl mothers are clear evidence of violated community norms--such as the importance of maintaining virginity and knowing a child's paternity and community-sanctioned notions of marriage. When girl mothers are disabled, have health problems, or are orphans, their situations are worsened.

We begin with a review of some recent research about girls associated with fighting forces. Next, we highlight our recent exploratory field work in one district (Kambia) and village (Mambolo) in Sierra Leone, summarize key issues facing girl mothers when they leave a fighting force, and give several recommendations.

Girls Associated with Fighting Forces.

Girls in fighting forces are usually characterized as victims

of gender-based violence (Mazurana & McKay, 2002; McKay & Mazurana, 2004). Recent studies shed light on the complicated roles girls play within a force, their distinct experiences from boys, and the variations within and between countries and regions as to their recruitment, experiences, gender status, and roles. Notably, few studies analyze issues of girl mothers.

Between 1990 and 2003, girls were present in government, militia, paramilitary and/or armed opposition forces in 55 countries. In many of these countries, they joined. In 27 countries, girls were abducted, and in 34 countries they served as fighters (McKay and Mazurana, 2004). From 2001 and 2003 McKay and Mazurana (2004) conducted a comparative study of girls associated with fighting forces in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Northern Uganda. In these countries, girls carried out traditional gender roles--for example, domestic work. Some girls attained positions of power within a force--such as being a commander, a spy, or a commander's wife.

A study of 23 girl combatants in four countries -- Angola, Colombia, Philippines, and Sri Lanka -- found girls' roles to be highly-diverse by country: girls served variably as perpetrators of violence, sexual slaves, cooks, radio communicators, and porters (Keairns, 2002). Girls in Colombia were provided with contraceptives to prevent pregnancies whereas in the Philippines girl combatants and boys were considered equals, and sexual abuse was not permitted. In contrast, in Angola, girls were subjected to extensive sexual violence from their captors. Using a gender perspective, Paez (2001) studied girls in Colombian armed groups. A consistent reason girls joined an armed group was to flee or create an alternative to maltreatment, sexual abuse, and an overload of domestic work to which they were subjected within their own families. Sometimes they thought an armed group would be a place where they would be treated as equals.

Community Reintegration of Girls.

In Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone, returning girls have experienced "second-rate reintegration" and have been discriminated against during DDR processes because they were viewed solely as "camp followers" or soldiers' wives (McKay and Mazurana, 2000, 2002, 2004). When they leave a force, most girls find their own ways to rural or urban communities -- sometimes with the assistance of supportive adults such as parents, community workers, and/or humanitarian workers. McKay and Mazurana concluded that girl mothers in Northern Uganda and Sierra



© Miranda Worthen, 2004

Young mother and her child, returned from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Sierra Leone

Leone are at high risk because they and their children are stigmatized and lack basic health care, food, shelter, clothing and education, and their mothers (and families) often have difficulty providing for them. Moreover, disorders of attachment with their children that develop from forced motherhood may affect children's development

In Gulu, Northern Uganda, 20 girls abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who participated in the rehabilitation program at GUSCO (a member of CSC) Center in Northern Uganda were interviewed by their peers (Save the Children, 2003). Among the study's findings were that the children of these girls were a key factor hindering resettlement and that girl mothers' re-integration requires a different approach than that of girls without children.

Exploratory Field Work in Sierra Leone.

In October 2003, in partnership with Save the Children UK (SC), Sierra Leone, we conducted exploratory field work in Kambia District (western Sierra Leone close to the Guinea border) to evaluate several data gathering methodologies that could be useful in researching girl mothers. We asked SC to locate a village where NGO involvement was not yet widespread but a positive relationship with the community had already been developed. We also requested to work in a village with a significant population of girl mothers.

Our key research question focused upon psychosocial reintegration of girl mothers and their children and factors making it possible for them to successfully reintegrate into the community. We used a community case analysis approach and gathered data through participant observation; interviews with girl mothers; group gatherings and interviews that employed local music and dance traditions; photography; and discussion with interpreters, SC staff, and key community leaders. These community leaders included women leaders of the Bondo Society, midwives, herbalists, and teachers. In both Kambia Town and Mambolo, we met with girl mothers who were engaged in prostitution for survival. We also assessed the situation of girl mothers enrolled in skills training programs in Mambolo and Kambia Town and talked with health and social welfare officials about these girls.

During our first few days living in the village of Mambolo (population 5000), more than 15 girls were identified by a local male teacher as girl mothers. With each passing day, additional girl mothers were located by a female teacher who also served as our

translator. She estimated that over 100 girl mothers were living in Mambolo and the surrounding villages. Girl mothers also told us about friends who returned from the RUF with children. We think, based upon our quick discovery of girl mothers, that more girl mothers existed in the chiefdom than 100.

Consistent with McKay's and Mazurana's findings (2004), we identified the following key issues.

- Girl mothers must reintegrate and survive within the context of a strained community infrastructure. Mambolo, an agricultural community, has seen low rice production for many years due to political instability and war. The village has no running water, sewage treatment, or electricity with the exception of a few generators that are often inoperative due to the cost of petrol. The health care system was decimated by corruption and the war, significantly reducing girls' access to health care. A small in-patient health unit that is currently being run by an NGO is several hours from Mambolo over rough roads. Finding transportation is difficult.
- Girl mothers and children experience a variety of health problems, including sexually-transmitted diseases, war injuries, malnutrition, malaria, headaches, chronic abdominal pain, and skin problems such as scabies.
- Girls and their children were provoked and stigmatized when they returned, although this lessened over time -- primarily because of the intervention of the paramount chief who directed the town crier to proclaim to the community that provocation was unacceptable.
- Most girl mothers have little or no education and lack marketable skills. Some told us they went from house-to-house to beg food. Others received "small small" compensation through plaiting hair, doing laundry, petty trade, or prostitution.
- Few of the girl mothers were married according to community customs. In order to be desirable for marriage, girls must have skills and be able to contribute to the family; few had enrolled in a skills training program. Lack of access to these programs and limited options for child care were key barriers to obtaining skills training.
- Girl mothers with few family support structures faced considerable hardship. Their parents were dead or unable to support them, and relatives had limited ability to help. Consequently, some girl

mothers were forced to enter prostitution to survive.

- Mambolo women leaders told us of small ways in which they helped girl mothers. They indicated their willingness, if given training, to work with these girls.
- We used both traditional and non-traditional methods to obtain psychosocial insights. Maria Gonsalves, a music therapist and musician, elicited significant information through traditional song and dance. Girl mothers sang songs they had created and also improvised songs based on topics we introduced. The girls conveyed, in ways not possible via the verbal interview process, thoughts and feelings about their relationships with men and boys, including their anger and distrust and their general states of sadness and loneliness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community-based assessment and approaches should be developed for this highly-vulnerable cohort of girl mothers and their children to pave the way for targeted assistance and long-term follow up. Women community leaders are key leaders and should be involved from the onset of program planning. Longitudinal research of girl mothers and their children, using comparative methods, should be conducted to provide a basis for developing policies and programs.

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CSC HIGHLIGHTS

SOUTH EAST ASIA COALITION DISCUSSES DDR IN EAST ASIA AND PACIFIC

By Maria Glenda R. Ramirez

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THAILAND/MYANMAR (BURMA) BORDER

On 19 to 20 March 2004, 21 persons representing 12 national, regional and international NGOs gathered in Chiang Mai, Thailand, for a preparatory meeting on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers in Myanmar. The preparatory meeting provided an update as to the situation of child soldiers in Myanmar; discussed DDR principles and definitions; presented the experiences and lessons learned by the Coalition in the Great Lakes region; and sought the inputs and insights from the participants in the implementation of future DDR programs inside Myanmar and along its borders.

Two workshops were also conducted, the first one focusing on the discussion of conditions and concerns that should be taken into consideration in DDR of child soldiers. The second workshop formulated strategies to address concerns and challenges identified during the first workshop. The strategies identified actions directed towards the military government and non-state actors in advocating for an end to the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Myanmar and the DDR of child soldiers.

The concluding statement, which summarized the workshops' results, was drafted and distributed during the workshop on DDR of

children involved in armed conflict in East Asia and the Pacific that UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office and the Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers organized on 22 to 24 March 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

DDR on child soldiers regional workshop

The Southeast Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and the Pacific Regional Office of UNICEF organized a workshop on DDR of children involved in armed conflict in East Asia and the Pacific on 22 to 24 March 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand. The objectives of the workshop were: to increase the awareness on child soldiers in the East Asia and Pacific region; to provide an update on the situation of child soldiers in the 3 focus countries (Burma/Myanmar, Indonesia and Philippines); to assess applicability of DDR best practices around the world in the East Asia and the Pacific region; and to develop regional DDR

strategies on child soldiers.

More than 70 participants and observers representing local NGOs, regional and international organizations, and the donor community attended the workshop.

SEACSUCS Steering Committee Meeting

On 25 to 27 March 2004, the Regional Steering Committee of the SEACSUCS (South East Asia Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers) held its assessment and planning meeting in Bangkok, Thailand. The following matters were discussed: establishment of an Executive Committee; office of the Regional Coordinator; regional networking; and program work. Priorities identified for March 2004 to March 2006 are the strengthening of national coalitions; integration of children's participation in national and regional activities; capacity building on research, DDR and advocacy; and Optional Protocol ratification campaign among governments and generation of commitments from non-state actors.



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Naing Aung, former chairperson of the All-Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF) and Glenda Ramirez, Regional Coordinator for South East Asia, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, at the alternative DDR workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand, 19-20 March 2004.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTHERN AFRICA NETWORK PARTICIPATES IN GLOBAL REPORT

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National coalitions from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) carried out research for entries in the Global Report on Child Soldiers.

The network was actively involved in the adaptation into Arabic of the Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, which was produced by UNICEF and the Child Soldiers Coalition. The guide will be used by the MENA Regional Coordinator and National Coalitions in the region to campaign and advocate for its ratification by the Governments of the region.

A research project on the active involvement of children in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is underway with the coordination of the Child Soldiers Coalition. The study is being carried out by a Palestinian organisation and an Israeli organisation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, respectively.

LATIN AMERICAN COALITION: LOOKING INTO CROSS BORDER RECRUITMENT

By **Andrés Vázquez**

CSC Latin America Regional Coordinator

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RESEARCH:

As part of the Global Report 2004 on Child Soldiers research process, national coalitions produced updates on child recruitment and country developments on national legislation regarding compulsory and voluntary military service. The Regional Coalition is preparing a regional report to coincide with the launch of the Global Report on Child Soldiers.

The Colombia Coalition is leading a cross-border project on the impact of armed conflict in children living in both sides of the border with Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela. The project is expected to look at the risks of recruitment or re-recruitment of children by non-state actors and issues related to the protection of refugee children in each country involved.

The Paraguay Coalition has begun coordinating research on military schools and compulsory military service in the MERCOSUR trading region (Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil), with a view to producing a report later on in the year.

CAMPAIGNS:

As agreed at the last regional meeting in Bogotá in October 2003, the campaign for the ratification of the Optional Protocol in Bolivia and Nicaragua began in February and continued with international letter writing actions in April.

The Coalition will participate in activities surrounding the OAS (Organisation of American States) General Assembly in Ecuador in June 2004, in conjunction with Amnesty International. The Coalition will present a document with information on previous OAS commitments on the subject of child soldiers and recommendations for further action by OAS countries. NGOs have begun working on a resolution on women's rights,

including the rights of girl-child soldiers, to be presented at the General Assembly.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

In January, the regional coordinator met with the Coalition's focal point in Brazil, *Viva Rio*, to discuss joint initiatives and visit the *Luta pela Paz* demobilization programme for children involved in gang violence. Between 18 and 28 April, the regional coordinator visited Quito and held high level meetings with representatives from the Ecuadorian government, NGOs and international organizations and carried out preliminary research in two border towns. One of the main objectives of the trip was to consolidate local organizations working on the issue of children's rights, such as the *Centro Segundo Montes Mozo*, current focal point in Ecuador; *Serpaj Ecuador*; JRS; and Amnesty International, into a national coalition. On 26 April, the Coalition, in conjunction with the Regional and the Ecuador UNICEF offices, presented the Latin American version of the Guide to the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

EUROPEAN COALITION: CALLING FOR A EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE

By **Casey Kelso**

CSC International Coordinator

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Representatives from seven European Coalitions agreed in March on an agenda of action at the European Union to protect children from armed conflict.

The meeting brought together some 25 individuals from Coalitions or partner organisations in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom; along with representatives of the Brussels-based Coalition on Children and Armed Conflict, which includes the EU lobbyists of Human Rights Watch, World Vision, Save the Children, UNICEF, Terre des hommes and Plan International.

Discussion centred around a landmark decision in December 2003 by the European Union to adopt Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict. The crux of implementation of the EU Guidelines is the creation of an EU

Special Representative, or Special Envoy. The European National Coalitions agreed to work together to develop a strong base of support for promoting the idea of appointing a Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict for Africa (*see action appeal in this newsletter*)

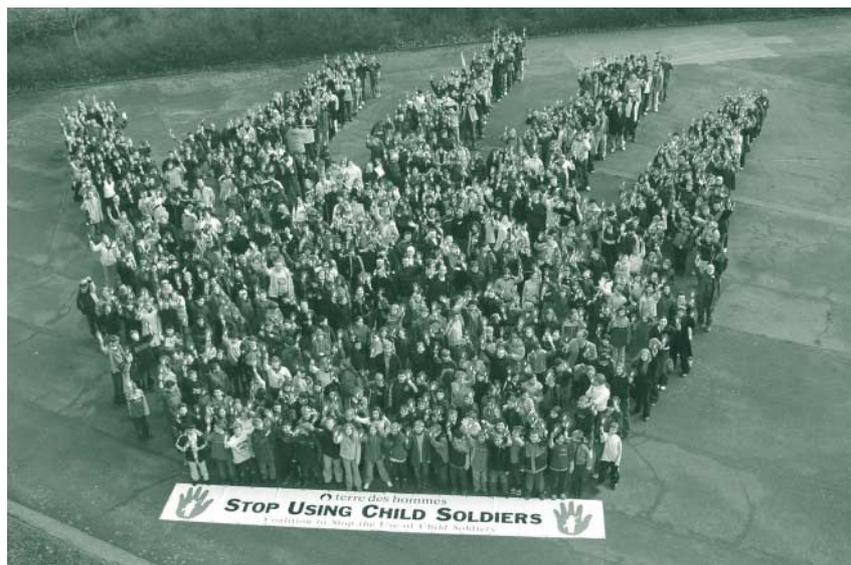
Plans for launching the Global Report 2004 were also discussed, as well as the issue of "twinning" European Coalitions with other national coalitions in conflict zones to provide political support and resources for their work.

CREATION OF THE SPANISH COALITION

The Spanish Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was launched on 12 February. The Coalition organised two simultaneous press conferences; one at a secondary School in Madrid and another in a school in Barcelona. The events were covered by more than 40 national and regional newspapers, radio stations and TV channels. The Spanish Coalition is currently formed of Save the Children and Amnesty International Spain.

© Terre des Hommes, 2004.

Red Hand Day, 12 February, at Albertus-Magnus school in Cologne, Germany



GREAT LAKES REGIONAL COALITION: A KEY MOMENT FOR THE BURUNDI COALITION

By Henri Nzeyimana

CSC Great Lakes Regional Coordinator

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The Great Lakes Regional Coalition held its third annual regional meeting in Nairobi on 6-7 February 2004, focused on advocacy; campaigning and research work on girl soldiers, especially those subject to sexual exploitation. Nineteen participants from national and international organisations, UNICEF and independent research institution attended the meeting. Two former child soldiers also joined the forum and provided valuable input to the discussions. Key discussions for the meeting were 1) to assess developments and challenges in the situation of child soldiers since June 2003 meeting, 2) to develop skills for research on girls and for the Global Report 2004 and 3) to devise strategies for the promotion of child participation.

The Great Lakes Regional Coordinator participated in March 2004 in a Regional DDR Workshop held in Bangkok, Thailand, for the East Asia and Pacific Region. He shared information with the participants from the region on child soldiers' situation in the Great Lakes and lessons learnt on DDR, mainly on

family tracing and reunification and psychosocial programming in unstable situations.

BURUNDI COALITION

The Burundi Coalition held a re-constitution meeting on 19 and 20 April 2004, with the presence of 18 national and international organisations based in Burundi, including UNICEF as an observer. The meeting was facilitated by the Great Lakes Regional Coordinator and the DRC National Coordinator. A Burundian organisation, Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) was elected as National Coordinator, and a two-year action plan was adopted.

UGANDA COALITION

Between 25 January and 5 February 2004, the Uganda National Coalition coordinator took part, on behalf of Save the Children in Uganda, which is a member of the child soldiers' coalition, in an advocacy tour to the United States and Canada by a six-person delegation of civil society members. The delegation's aim was to meet international policy and decision-makers in an appeal to become involved in the resolution of an 18-year conflict that is devastating the people of Northern Uganda, especially children.

Advocacy for the inclusion of the child soldier situation in Uganda on the UN Security Council agenda and LRA child captives during the ICC prosecution were highlighted by the Uganda advocacy team.

DRC NATIONAL COALITION

The DRC Coalition has undertaken a large number of activities over the past three months, including cross-border sharing of information and experience on prevention and DDR programs with the Burundi Child Soldiers Project; participation in Amnesty International's research project on rape and sexual violence against women and girls; networking with the youth and children Platform on Human Rights and Gender in the Great Lakes Region; and strengthening media work on sensitisation and advocacy for the prevention of child recruitment.

The National Coalition is carrying out a preliminary research project on girls associated with armed groups in eastern DRC, primarily focused on military sources. The objective of the preliminary research is to gather useful information for further research on recruitment and involvement of girls and the causes of why they do not appear in DDR programs.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REPORT ON CHILD SOLDIERS IN BURUNDI

In March 2004, Amnesty International published the report "Burundi: Child soldiers – the challenge of demobilization". The document summarizes the use of child soldiers by parties to the conflict, although its main aim is to reiterate key principles underlying successful DDR programs and to appeal to relevant sectors of the international

community to support and assist in the DDR process in Burundi.

The number of child soldiers who have been abducted or recruited into Burundi's 10-year armed conflict is not known. However, military leaders have widely recruited child soldiers, sending children as young as 10 to the front lines. According to UNICEF, some 6,000 to

7,000 child soldiers require demobilization; among them, scores of girls, many abducted into sexual slavery by armed political groups.

The report is available on www.amnesty.org Amnesty International is a member of the International Steering Committee of CSC

THE INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT COORDINATES GLOBAL REPORT

CSC International Secretariat

Email: info@child-soldiers.org

Web page: www.child-soldiers.org

The second Global Report on Child Soldiers will be published in November 2004. Unique of its kind, it will include relevant information on child recruitment legislation and practice in every country in the world and in-depth information on those conflicts where children

are used as soldiers, as well as other issues regarding demobilisation programs, juvenile justice for former child soldiers and military training. International, national and regional coalition members and CSC partners are participating in the research phase. Information, gathered in the field and on five continents, is being compiled by seven experts, coordinated by the International

Secretariat of the Coalition.

From February to May 2004, the International Secretariat facilitated national and regional coalition meetings and workshops involving capacity building in monitoring child soldiers use and carried out field missions in Kenya, Myanmar (Burma), Southern Sudan and Thailand.

HOW MANY CHILD SOLDIERS: IS THE 300,000 STILL VALID?

By Derek Brett

Ever since it was first published, in the second (1998) edition of “The Invisible Soldiers”, the figure of 300,000 child soldiers in the world has been repeated almost every time something is written on the subject. But can a total calculated six years ago still be valid today? Until the research for the Coalition’s new Global Report is complete there can be no question of attempting a definitive recount, but it might be helpful to put this figure in context.

In fact, that first reference was simply to a minimum “number of children recently involved” in “36 current or recent conflicts”. It never purported to be more than a crude attempt to indicate the scale of the problem. As such it erred on the side of caution, not only in the number quoted, but also in referring to a limited list of situations. The methodology for the 300,000 figure was deliberately vague in the (non-) definition of involvement and the precise time-scale covered. It is the openness of the specification which makes it very likely that, despite all the uncertainties and inadequacies of the raw information, an equivalent exercise in any subsequent year could have justified the same estimated total. This said, the quantified information available has in fact improved dramatically over the last 18 months, with an increasing number of sources providing up-to-date estimates of the total number of child soldiers in different countries. In round terms these new figures still appear to point towards the same global aggregate, but many more of the individual components that make up the 300,000 figure can now be solidly based on estimates made by workers in the field.

So much for the total. But is the global trend upward or downward? In some countries the situation is clear: there are many fewer child soldiers in Afghanistan, Angola or Sierra Leone than there were five or 10 years ago. Evidence also suggests that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC) or the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda are still net recruiters of child soldiers. Meanwhile, new situations in Côte d’Ivoire, Central African Republic, Nepal and elsewhere have emerged and all these conflicts are dwarfed by the numbers involved in Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan. So is the increase in one country or region slightly greater or less than the decrease in another? And would it signify

anything meaningful if it was?

More important is to note that there are two respects in which the hackneyed 300,000 figure remains a serious under-representation.

First, by being specifically linked to participation in armed conflicts it excludes a perhaps equivalent number worldwide who have not been involved in armed conflict but are under eighteen, in uniform, and have a formal army record. Their recruitment may not have breached existing national and international law, and the main attention rightly focuses on more abusive situations, but this does not alter the fact that they are “child soldiers” by even the narrowest definition. Equally, many other children have been mobilised as soldiers in situations which did not at the time qualify as full-scale armed conflicts. All in all, at the time of the Coalition’s 2001 Global Report, it was estimated that child soldiers were to be found in more than 85 countries. Thanks to trend of growing ratification of the Optional Protocol, it is to be hoped that the 2004 Global Report will show that this list has shrunk considerably. Even so, any count that takes in these broader categories should continue to indicate a total of more than 300,000 child soldiers, perhaps well over half a million.

Second, even in a country situation where the total number has not significantly changed over the past six years, it can include very few of the same individuals. To still be under 18 today, a child would have had to be under 12 in 1998. It is no accident that in situations with widespread abductions - classically the LRA in northern Uganda - the quoted figure tends to be not an estimate of the number of children currently with the group, but of the total number who have been affected over time. The children concerned were identified and documented as individuals before they became part of a problem. In other situations too, a much fuller understanding would be possible if informed estimates were

forthcoming of the level of first-time recruitment, and of the typical, not the extreme, ages at which it was taking place.

For instance, if there is indeed a

fairly constant total of 300,000 children involved in armed conflict, and if the average age at first recruitment is 15 (or slightly younger but with losses to death, disability, demobilisation or capture), this would imply that, on average, something like 100,000 are recruited for the first time each year, or a million over the course of ten years. All of these individuals, and their societies, will be indelibly shaped by this experience. What would the history of modern Sierra Leone have looked like without the recruitment of two particular thirteen-year-olds into the British West Africa Army’s “small boys unit” back in the 1950’s? Their names? Foday Sankoh and Hinga Norman, who later became rebel leaders and recruited massive numbers of child soldiers.

Thinking in these terms also helps to emphasise the importance of preventive measures. How can the few hundreds and thousands currently passing through demobilisation programmes possibly counterbalance this mass recruitment? What proportion of current child soldiers will have been permanently demobilised by the time that they reach the age of 18? By contrast, what would be the effect on numbers if all child recruitment were to stop tomorrow? Within perhaps a year 300,000 would become 200,000 as existing child soldiers pass the age of 18 without being replaced by new recruits, and the decline in numbers would thereafter continue at least the same rate. Well within a decade, child soldiers would effectively be a thing of the past.

Evidence also suggests that the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the United Self-Defence Groups of Colombia (AUC) or the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda are still net recruiters of child soldiers.

GETTING THE PRIORITIES RIGHT: ENDING EXCLUSION

At the Coalition's open-air office space in London, it has been hard to get work done. We've employed nine different additional researchers who are coming in and out of the office with their latest country research for the second-ever Child Soldiers Global Report, to be published in November 2004. Faxes and e-mails are pouring in with information.

The exciting aspect of the Global Report 2004 is that our National Coalitions and NGO partners are also involved in this worldwide research and monitoring network. The scores of additional "grassroots" researchers have contributed local sources of information to the report. Their voices will no longer be excluded from international debate about the child soldiers issue. It is a fundamental challenge to include those often left out in planning and discussions, including children themselves, girls and girl mothers, and country situations not receiving attention from the world's media.

This edition of the Newsletter focuses on the theme of exclusion. Inside are the stories of girl child soldiers with children of their own who have experienced "second-rate demobilisation" (Sierra Leone, Uganda); boys who wonder about re-joining rebel groups hoping to get cash payments from donors (Sudan); and scared children who flee the ranks of an army across the border but – lacking status as a refugee – could be sent back to face execution as deserters (Myanmar/Thailand).

The irony of their situation is that they will remain excluded from the recent international action being taken by the United Nations Security Council. On 22 April 2004, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1539. Jo Becker notes in her article that in many situations of child soldier use – among them Uganda, Sudan and Myanmar – the new resolution calls only for a further report of wrong-doing. Why? Becker explains that a dispute by the United Kingdom and Russia over the listing of Northern Ireland and Chechnya – where it is acknowledged children *are* in the ranks of armed groups – led to a decision that the UN will act against only on the use of child soldiers in those countries officially put on the Security Council agenda.

It appears hypocritical that two permanent members of the Security Council have excluded any steps to help children who are fighting and dying in conflicts on their "back doorsteps". Powerful political actors focused not on the plight of children but on their own interests. Graça Machel, who authored the UN's groundbreaking study on child soldiers in 1996, spoke about this when answering a question from a Palestinian girl at the May 2002 General Assembly Special Session on the Child. The teen girl wanted to know why the international community had not done something for Palestine despite years of UN resolutions.

"Your question is the worst indictment against all of us, whether we're the UN or NGOs or just mothers: We've been unable to make these international machineries make a difference," Machel said. "We've been doing something but it hasn't been enough. The problem is not that we don't have the power, but because we cannot convince that power to be used."

Graça Machel proposed a simple solution that seems impossible, but surely is the only way forward. "We must ask each government if it is doing enough to get its priorities right, in allocating resources to take guns away from kids and give them a book instead," Machel said. "Ask your government that. It doesn't matter how poor a country you are, if you have your priorities right, then the taps by the UN can push the government in the right direction."

The Coalition hopes that the Global Report 2004 will persuade all governments, rich or poor, to act to protect children in every country where child soldiers are found.

Casey Kelso

Co-ordinator

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). It is produced with the financial support of the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

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

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The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) works to prevent the use of children as soldiers and to promote their demobilisation, rehabilitation and social reintegration. The CSC is comprised of national, regional and international organisations and coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. It was founded in 1998 by Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, Jesuit Refugee Service, Quaker United Nations Office Geneva, SCF-UK for the International Save the Children Alliance, International Federation Terre des Hommes and World Vision International.

PLEASE SUPPORT OUR WORK

We welcome donations and/or practical support for our on-going campaign. Donations may be sent by Pound Sterling cheque or bank draft to the address below. To obtain more information about local campaigns and activities, or to share information about your own activities and events relating to child soldiers, please visit our website or contact the Coalition Secretariat.

Design: Samson + associates
Editor: Enrique Restoy
Print: JAMM Print & Productions

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The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers is registered as a limited company (no. 4411965) in England.

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