



Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

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Sri Lanka: Child Soldiers Coalition calls for UN Special Envoy to urgently investigate abductions and other abuses of children

London, 20 May 2009

Children (under-18s) are being abducted from refugee camps and from Vavuniya town in northern Sri Lanka by paramilitary groups who enjoy tacit support from the Sri Lankan government, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers said today.

The Coalition welcomed the recent initiative by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on children and armed conflict to send a special envoy to Sri Lanka to investigate these and other abuses against children. The Sri Lankan government is reported to have agreed in principle to such a visit.

“The last phase of fighting in Sri Lanka has had a catastrophic impact on children. The special envoy’s visit needs to take place without delay,” said Victoria Forbes Adam, Director of the Coalition. The envoy must be given all necessary support to carry out an independent assessment of the situation to identify measures needed to protect children from abuses. The special envoy also needs to investigate the impact of the broader humanitarian disaster on children. The findings of the Special envoy should be formally submitted to the Security Council, the Coalition said.

The Coalition has received verified reports of abductions of under-18s from inside and outside internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Vavuniya, as well as recruitment and re-recruitment of children by paramilitary groups in the eastern districts of Batticaloa and Trincomalee.

Paramilitary groups such as the Eelam People’s Democratic Party (EPDP), People’s Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) and Tamil People’s Liberation Tigers (TMVP)-Karuna faction have apparently unhindered access to the IDP camps in Vavuniya, despite the presence of the Sri Lankan military which is responsible for protecting these camps. According to humanitarian workers, most of the abductions are reported at night when scrutiny is minimal. Children as young as 12 years have been abducted. The precise motives for abduction remain unclear. Some children appear to have been abducted for alleged links with the LTTE, while others are kidnapped for ransom.

Protection of children in IDP camps in the north is a matter of urgent concern. On 16 May, the Competent Authority responsible for relief coordination in Vavuniya reportedly refused access to international agencies responsible for protection and monitoring in the camps. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said on 18 May that restrictions on access to the Vavuniya camps are impeding their ability to monitor the situation and distribute aid.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers unites 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, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, and the Jesuit Refugee Service.



Tens of thousands of unaccompanied children have fled the conflict zone in the north. Without adequate protection, these traumatised and under-nourished children are vulnerable to abduction and other human rights abuses, the Coalition said. The government has made little progress in establishing procedures for tracing and reunifying unaccompanied and separated children with their families.

“The humanitarian crisis has put a severe strain on the capacity of agencies to protect children. It is vital that the government provide them with access to the camps so that they can do their job,” said Ms Forbes Adam.

There are fears for the safety of former LTTE child soldiers at military screening check points at Velikulam, Killinochchi, Omanthai and Pulmuddai and in military detention centers where they are allegedly taken for questioning. All those fleeing the armed conflict must pass through the check points where LTTE members are identified and, in the case of child soldiers, transferred to rehabilitation centres. In the absence of independent monitoring of the screening process there are fears that children are at risk of human rights abuses including arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance.

In the east, there are sporadic reports of child recruitment by the TMVP. However, reporting of child recruitment continues to be low because of high levels of fear and the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms. The former head of the TMVP V. Muralitharan (known as Colonel Karuna), was an LTTE commander in the east responsible for recruiting thousands of children into the LTTE before 2004. He subsequently recruited children into the ranks of the breakaway TMVP. He joined the ruling United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) in 2008 and was appointed Minister of National Integration and Reconciliation in the Sri Lankan government in April 2009. In this regard, the SRSG’s special envoy should explore ways to strengthen the monitoring and reporting mechanisms in Sri Lanka, in line with Security Council resolution 1612.

The Coalition urged the Sri Lankan government to allow the SRSG’s special envoy unhindered access to IDP camps, screening checkpoints and detention centres where under-18s with suspected links to the LTTE are held.

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