



Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

International Secretariat

2-12 Pentonville Road, 2nd floor, London N1 9HF

Tel: +44 207 713 2761 Fax: +44 207 713 2794

Email: info@child-soldiers.org Web: www.child-soldiers.org

Registered as a limited company (no. 4411965) and charity (no. 1095237) in England

Extract from:

CHILD SOLDIER USE 2003: A Briefing for the 4th UN Security Council Open Debate on Children and Armed Conflict

Published on 16 January 2004

UGANDA

Government forces

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

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

Non-state armed groups

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

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

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

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

Demobilization and child protection programs

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

Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰ Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative statement, June 26, 2003; Commission for Justice and Peace, cited in "Thousands of Uganda School Children March, Call for Peace", Dow Jones International News, 23 August 2003.

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