



## **State Department Reports on the Use of Child Soldiers**

On March 8, 2006, the U.S. State Department released its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The reports detail information on 196 countries compiled by Foreign Service Officers abroad, domestic and international human rights groups, academics, activists, jurists and journalists that work to recount human rights conditions around the globe. These annual reports point “to the areas of progress and draw attention to new and continuing challenges” in the human rights realm, and are to be “used as a resource for shaping policy, conducting diplomacy and making assistance, training and other resource allocations.”

While each report has traditionally assessed internationally recognized human rights as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including respect for the integrity of the person, civil liberties, political rights, and workers rights, the report also includes a section on the use of child soldiers. In accordance with the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of FY 2003, the human rights reports include a description of the “nature and extent of the compulsory recruitment and conscription of individuals under the age of 18” by all armed groups in every country, and what steps have been taken by the governments of the respective countries to eliminate such practices. The reports must also list which countries have ratified the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which:

- Requires states to “take all feasible measures” to ensure that members of their armed forces under the age of 18 years do not participate in hostilities;
- Prohibits the conscription of anyone under the age of 18 into the armed forces;
- Requires states to raise the age of voluntary recruitment from 15 and to deposit a binding declaration of the minimum age for recruitment into its armed forces; and
- Prohibits the recruitment or use in hostilities of children under the age of 18 by rebel or other non-governmental armed groups, and requires states to criminalize such practices.

This year’s reports highlight 25 countries in which child soldiers have been used; among the worst violators are the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), government security forces in Burma, and both government forces and armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo. All 25 countries mentioned in this year’s reports were also mentioned in last year’s reports. Previous references to child soldiers in Central African Republic were absent in this year’s report. Additionally, no new recruitment or successful demobilization of child soldiers had occurred in six of the 25 countries. Below are excerpts from the 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on the topic. For the full reports please see: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/>.

## **Afghanistan**

There were no new reports of the recruitment of child soldiers since President Karzai's 2003 decree prohibiting the recruitment of children and young persons under the age of 22 into the army. In 2004 UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] initiated a program that demobilized and reintegrated approximately four thousand of an estimated eight thousand former child soldiers. The remaining four thousand soldiers were transitioned out of the military during the year.

## **Angola**

The government, assisted by UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], continued implementation of its post-conflict child soldier protection strategy. As outlined in the strategy, those designated as child soldiers were given access to special resources, including skills training, assistance with civil registration, and access to special social assistance; they were assured they would not be recruited or reenlisted in the military.

## **Belarus**

The law allows military units to adopt and train orphans between the ages of 14 and 16. While these children are not enlisted in the military, they must comply with military rules, wear a uniform, and obey orders. They are required to join the unit upon reaching the draft age of 18.

## **Burma**

The UN [United Nations] Children's Fund, AI [Amnesty International], and Human Rights Watch reported that insurgent groups, as well as government forces, recruited child soldiers.

The official age of enlistment in the army is 18 years; however, voluntary enlistment was permitted by minors from the age of 15. As a policy, the government stated it did not conscript child soldiers; however, recruiters frequently ignored the policy. At a press conference held on March 15 the government admitted that "inefficient" recruiters conscripted underage children, but claimed that the government had "taken action" against as many as five such recruiters in 2003. The government also claimed to have sent home 75 forcibly recruited child soldiers in 2003 and another 50 in 2004. In January 2004 the government established the Committee for Preventing Recruitment of Child Soldiers (CPRCS), which met again in August 2004 and purportedly issued new rules and regulations to punish those who recruit child soldiers. In March 2004 diplomatic observers received a report that the authorities had arrested more than a dozen children in Rangoon and forced them into military service. In the past army recruitment drives targeted children to meet quotas for the ostensibly all-volunteer army, but anecdotal evidence, at least in Rangoon, suggested this practice was now not as common.

In June 2004 the UN [United Nations] Committee on the Rights of the Child report welcomed the establishment of the government's CPRCS but noted the UN committee remained "concerned by the impact of the armed conflicts on children, especially the use of children below the age of 15 years as soldiers by both government armed forces and armed ethnic groups."

There was evidence of continued forced recruitment of child soldiers by the army.

On April 23, two underage soldiers defected from the Burmese Army to the side of the Karenni National Progressive Party during fighting, according to international media sources. Private Myo Min, age 15, and Private Soe Thu, age 16, reported that they were both from the Light Infantry Brigade 112 of Division 55, based in Kalaw, Shan State. Myo Min said he was forcibly recruited in December 2004 from Shwebo, Sagaing Division, where he was working as a waiter. He was given the choice of joining the army or going to prison. He opted to be a soldier but was not allowed to inform his mother and

feared she still did not know what happened to him. After more than four months of training, authorities transferred him to Thit Paung Zeik Camp. He deserted less than a month later. Soe Thu, who shared a similar experience as Myo Min, had been in the military for six months before he ran away.

During the year, the ILO [International Labor Organization] was unsuccessful in resolving the case of Private Aung Myo Paing, 16, who deserted his regiment (LIB 6) near Shwepyitha. He approached the ILO for assistance to retire from the army. The ILO issued a letter to the CPRCS requesting that he be allowed to leave. Nevertheless, the regiment commander court-martialed him and he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment. In another case, a child soldier who reportedly deserted his unit was arrested and ordered to serve in a frontier zone.

The ILO assisted in obtaining the release of some underage soldiers who had been forcibly recruited. In 2004 the ILO notified the government of nine allegations of forced recruitment of children into the military. Two of the cases involved boys who had been sentenced to prison, or who were facing court martial for desertion. The government has cooperated with some of the ILO investigations and also conducted its own investigations and reported to the ILO on eight of these cases, but claimed no incidents of forced recruitment. In two cases the military released the boys, who returned home, but there was no further action. In five cases the government insisted the boys were above 18 years old. The government was unable to find one of the alleged child soldiers.

According to a UN source, in November 2004, a military conscription unit of three soldiers visited Se Ywa village of Thongwa Township, Rangoon Division. Four youths were required to accompany the soldiers to the military conscription center at Mingaladon, Thongwa Township. Residents say that the youths were subsequently sent to Military Training Center No. 6 in Patheingyi. The parents of the students filed complaints with the CPRCS.

In 2004 the Burmese Army organized tours of two recruitment centers for UN representatives, who naturally found no evidence of recruitment of underage children on these visits. International observers were not allowed unfettered access to investigate independently charges of forced conscription by the military.

Several international NGOs [non-governmental organizations] and agencies promoted the rights of children in the country, including ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross], World Vision, Save the Children UK [United Kingdom], CARE, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], the UN Development Program, and foreign governments. UNICEF expanded its operations in 2004 to open a separate child protection section. In July 2004 UNICEF, in conjunction with the Supreme Court of Burma, ran a "National Workshop on Juvenile Justice and Child Protection" that concluded an action plan aimed at strengthening the existing juvenile justice system.

Ethnic minority cease-fire groups and insurgent armies also forcibly conscripted child soldiers, and there were significant numbers of child soldiers drafted into these forces, particularly the United Wa State Army. Inaccessibility to the areas where these groups operate made it difficult to obtain reliable data on the extent of the problem among ethnic armies.

## **Burundi**

There were reports that security forces continued to use children to perform menial tasks without compensation; however, the government removed child soldiers from government security forces and demobilized approximately 3,015 children by year's end. According to the UN [United Nations]

Children's Fund (UNICEF), by year's end security forces were no longer using children as soldiers for combat, although other sources reported that children continued to serve in the security forces as spies and porters and to perform other menial tasks.

Under the law the country's minimum age for military recruitment is 16, although the government stated that no one under 18 was recruited. According to a report by Maison Shalom, as of February approximately seven thousand children were serving as child soldiers in the security forces and various rebel groups. A joint government-UNICEF project demobilized 3,015 child soldiers from the government security forces as well as from former rebel groups by year's end. According to UNICEF, by year's end security forces were no longer using children as soldiers for combat, although other sources reported that children continued to serve in the security forces as spies and porters and to perform other menial tasks. By year's end all members of the former rebel groups had either been demobilized or integrated into the government security forces.

The PALIPEHUTU-FNL [Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People/National Liberation Front] continued to use and recruit child soldiers. During the last 2 weeks in May, the FDN [National Defense Force] arrested 100 child soldiers at various locations throughout the country who had been recruited by the PALIPEHUTU-FNL. According to a military spokesperson, the FDN arrested some children as they entered the country from the eastern region of the DRC, where they were undergoing military training. The FDN arrested other children in Bujumbura and the provinces of Bujumbura Rural, Bubanza, Kayanza, Muramvya, and Muyinga. The spokesperson said the majority were between 10 and 15 years old and that the PALIPEHUTU-FNL had recruited all of them after May, after the rebel group had signed a cease-fire agreement with the government. Reportedly, 22 of those arrested were turned over to the national demobilization campaign and were demobilized at year's end. It was unclear what happened to the other 78 children.

### **Chad**

The law prohibits use of child soldiers, and UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] protection officers reported that the practice was not widespread. Although reliable information was difficult to obtain, UNICEF estimated in 2003 that there were approximately 600 child soldiers serving in government security forces and armed groups in the country; however, that number was believed to have decreased during the year and no further confirmed recruitment of children for use as soldiers was reported. However, in late December, unconfirmed reports of forced recruitment of male youths circulated after the government began enforcing a curfew during the holidays, in particular of forced recruitment in N'Djamena and Abeche.

### **Colombia**

Although the law prohibits service in the public security forces before age 18, both paramilitaries and guerrillas forcibly recruited and used children as soldiers. The IOM [International Organization for Migration] estimated that since 1999 it assisted 2,426 children in the country who had been members of illegal armed groups. The Ministry of Defense estimated that 20 percent of FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] members were minors and that most guerrilla fighters had joined the FARC ranks as children.

A 2002 UN [United Nations] Children's Fund (UNICEF) study noted that because of limited educational and economic opportunities and a desire for acceptance and camaraderie, an estimated 83 percent of child soldiers volunteered. Nevertheless, many children found membership in guerrilla and paramilitary organizations difficult, and the Ministry of Defense reported an increase in the number of minors deserting illegal armed groups. At least 526 children surrendered to state security forces during

the year and were transferred to ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute], who operated a reinsertion program for former child soldiers. Of these, 176 were former members of the FARC. Unlike in previous years, no child ex-combatants were assisted in their communities.

### **Democratic Republic of Congo**

Several of the human rights violations reported in previous years, including militia attacks on internally displaced persons (IDPs), were not reported this year; and there were fewer reports of the recruitment of child soldiers and of attacks on civilians by military forces.

Armed groups operating outside of government control in parts of the east committed numerous human rights violations, including civilian massacres; the burning and destruction of entire villages; frequently killing, abducting, torturing, or raping some of the inhabitants, especially in rural areas of North and South Kivu provinces, northern Katanga Province, and Ituri District of Orientale Province; the forcible recruitment of child soldiers; and the rape of women and girls. Armed groups also forced civilians to pay “security premiums.” Large numbers of civilians were displaced. Disputes and shifting alliances between various armed groups resulted in frequent human rights violations against civilians, who were accused of supporting one of several groups who opposed each other.

The FARDC [Congolese Armed Forces] and other armed groups continued to have child soldiers in their ranks. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the government provided support to armed groups that continued to recruit child soldiers. The government continued to collaborate with UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] and other partners to demobilize children associated with the FARDC and armed groups.

In eastern parts of the country, where armed groups operated outside government control, children committed and were victims of serious crimes. Credible estimates of the total number of children associated with armed groups varied widely from 15,000 to 30 thousand, many of whom were between 14 and 16. Armed groups, including Mai Mai, continued to abduct and forcibly recruit children to serve as forced laborers, porters, combatants, “war wives,” and sex.

In May an international organization reported that uniformed armed men were recruiting Congolese children in two Rwandan refugee camps for use as soldiers. According to the organization's report, on May 10, 45 children between the ages of 10 and 18 climbed onto a truck parked outside the entrance to Kiziba Camp in Rwanda's Kibuye Province, and their whereabouts were still not known by year's end. Parents in the camp told the organization's representative that the militia, which they said was the RCD-G [Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma], intended to attract at least a total of 80 new recruits. However, the organization's representative received differing reports; a local government official attributed the recruitment to Ugandans, while other sources indicated that members of the Rwandan military were recruiting in one of the camps. There were no further reports of such activities by year's end.

There were numerous reports that some local authorities in the country attempted to recruit child soldiers for armed groups, although there was no specific information that they or higher-level officials assisted traffickers for bribes or other compensation. There were no reports that action had been taken against those accused or suspected of facilitating recruitment of child soldiers, or other forms of trafficking.

In anticipation of a national military census, some armed group commanders reportedly recruited child soldiers and regularly diverted the salaries of child soldiers for their own gain.

Girls associated with armed groups were often assaulted, raped, and infected with HIV/AIDS. According to *Forgotten Casualties of War*, a report published in August by the NGO [non-governmental organization] Save the Children, 12,500 girls belonged to government and non-government forces, and a program to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate all militias into society was failing these girls. According to the report, the girls did not see themselves as child soldiers, but as “wives” or camp followers and therefore did not believe they were entitled to demobilization and reintegration benefits. In addition the NGO said the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process informed communities that girls were involved with armed groups, triggering community rejection of them. Girls told the NGO that community members assumed them to have been sexually abused and to be carriers of HIV and sexually transmitted diseases. As a result, they were seen as having “lost their value” to their communities.

### **Cote d’Ivoire**

There were fewer reports of the enrollment of child soldiers, and many were released.

Progovernment militias continued to recruit children, both on a voluntary and a forced basis. On February 28, the UN [United Nations] arrested and handed over to FANCI [National Armed Forces] members of a progovernment militia that attacked the rebel outpost of Lougouale. Many of the attackers were children.

Progovernment militias and rebel forces continued to use child soldiers. During the year 4 militia groups in the Guiglo area submitted to UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] a list of 150 children for DDR [disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration]. On February 28, UN forces captured approximately 70 rebel attackers, including many child soldiers, during fighting in Logouale, a town in rebel-held territory in the western region. On June 13, in Man, UNICEF and a local NGO [non-governmental organization] demobilized 57 children, including 3 girls, who had received military training and were ready for battle. The children, who were aged 10 to 16 and included 3 girls, were placed in an interim care facility where they received psychological assistance and job training. During the year in Bouake, UNICEF also demobilized 137 children, including 83 girls.

### **Indonesia**

Unlike last year there were no reports of children being used as human shields or as combatants; however, one child was killed in a clash in Aceh.

### **Israel and the occupied territories**

Palestinian terrorist groups used minors to conduct attacks, smuggle weapons, or act as human shields. On August 29, the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] arrested a 14-year-old Palestinian at the Huwwara checkpoint, near Nablus, as he attempted to smuggle three pipe bombs.

### **Democratic People’s Republic of Korea**

In addition foreign visitors and academic sources reported that from an early age children were subjected to several hours a week of mandatory military training and indoctrination at their schools.

## **Liberia**

There also were reports of the recruitment of child soldiers, but the reports had not been confirmed, and the matter was under investigation at year's end.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that former rebel combatants forcibly conscripted persons, including children, to serve as porters, laborers, and sex slaves.

## **Nepal**

During the year Maoists continued their campaign of torturing, killing, bombing, conscripting children, kidnapping, extorting, forcing closures of schools and businesses, and committing other serious and gross human rights abuses.

Maoists used civilians, including children, as human shields in wave attacks against fortified military positions. Both sides in the conflict used children as informant.

Maoists abducted teenagers and some younger children to serve as porters, runners, cooks, and armed cadre. Most children abducted from their schools for political education sessions were returned home within a few days, but some remained with the Maoists, either voluntarily or under compulsion. The Maoists denied recruiting children. In September the RNA [Royal Nepalese Army] estimated that 30 percent of Maoist guerillas were under the age of 18, and some were as young as 10.

There were credible reports that the Maoists forcibly recruited children, including girls, as soldiers, human shields, runners, and messengers.

## **Paraguay**

On June 15, government officials, NGOs [non-governmental organizations], and UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] released a report regarding the conscription of minors. The report found isolated incidents of continued forced or deceitful recruitment in the city of Salto del Guaira, Canindeyu Department, and documented accusations of torture and ill-treatment of conscripts in the cities of Altos, Cordillera Department; Ciudad del Este, Alto Parana Department; and Mariscal Estigarribia, Boqueron Department. The report also noted the recruitment of indigenous youths who were exempt from obligatory military service.

The government established review procedures for military conscripts to prevent enlistment of minors and to investigate and report on abuses and conditions. The government requires that all military officers responsible for recruiting ensure that all conscripts meet the legal minimum age of 18. The armed forces has a human rights office responsible for helping NGOs investigate the alleged use of forged documents and illegal recruiting practices.

## **Peru**

Narcotics traffickers and Shining Path terrorists continued to hold indigenous families captive in remote areas, using their labor, including that of children, to grow food crops and coca.

## **Philippines**

Children were targeted for recruitment as combatants and noncombatants by the NPA [New People's Army] and ASG [Abu Sayyaf Group]. There were an estimated two thousand child soldiers in the country. By mid-year an International Labor Organization (ILO)-led program demobilized and reintegrated into society three hundred children. The NPA claimed that it assigned persons 15 to 18 years of age to self-defense and noncombatant duties; however, there were reports that the NPA

continued to use minors in combat. In a July 2004 report the Council for Welfare of Children estimated that children constituted between 13 to 18 percent of armed rebel combatants. In the last several years, the AFP [Armed Forces of the Philippines] on numerous occasions captured or killed NPA fighters who turned out to be minors.

The ASG also recruited teenagers to fight and participate in its activities. There were reports that a significant number of ASG members staffing the groups' camps were teenagers. The AFP stated that some Islamic schools in Mindanao served as fronts to indoctrinate children and that the ASG used children as couriers and spies.

### **Russia**

Unlike previous years, there were no reports that Chechen rebels used children to plant mines and explosives

### **Rwanda**

During the year there were reports, including one by a UN [United Nations] panel of experts, that the government and uniformed men suspected of being from a DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo]-based armed group were recruiting children in Rwandan refugee camps for use as child soldiers. However, the government denied that it had engaged in any such recruitment activities; it also said such practice was contrary to government policy, and that it had investigated these incidents by year's end.

Based on investigations conducted and information collected in late 2004 and part of the year, a UN panel of experts reported that the RDF [Rwanda Defense Forces] was recruiting children in Rwandan refugee camps for use as soldiers.

In addition in May an international organization reported that uniformed men from Congo-based militias—suspected of belonging to the RCD-G [Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma]—were recruiting children in two Rwandan refugee camps (Kiziba Camp and Gihembe Camp) for use as soldiers. According to the organization's report, on May 10, 45 children between the ages of 10 and 18 climbed onto a truck parked outside the entrance to Kiziba Camp in Rwanda's Kibuye Province, and their whereabouts were still not known by year's end. Parents in the camp told the organization's representative that the militia, which they said was the RCD-G, intended to attract at least a total of 80 new recruits. While there were some allegations of RDF involvement, senior Rwandan government officials stated that recruitment of child soldiers was not government policy and investigated the incidents. There were no further reports of such activities by year's end.

### **Solomon Islands**

Several hundred children (generally boys) under the age of 18 were active combatants during the ethnic conflict or assisted in militants' camps. Many of these underage militants joined criminal gangs immediately following the conflict, but most have returned to their villages and reentered civil society. However, some unemployed youth in urban areas were involved in petty crime.

### **Somalia**

Children remained among the chief victims of the continuing violence. Boys as young as 14 or 15 years of age have participated in militia attacks, and many youths were members of the marauding gangs known as “morian” (parasites or maggots). This year's annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict documented grave violations against children in Somalia. The report focused violations that are being systematically committed against children in Somalia: killing or

maiming of children; the recruitment or use of child soldiers; attacks against schools or hospitals; rape or other grave sexual violence against children; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children.

The Somaliland Republic constitution contains no minimum age of recruitment into the armed forces. There were no reports of minors under-18 in its forces, and the authorities generally accepted that recruits should not be under 20-years-old, but an inadequate system of birth registration made it difficult to establish the age of recruits.

The pre-1991 Labor Code and the unimplemented TFC [Transitional Federal Charter] prohibit child labor; however, child labor was a problem, and there were child soldiers.

### **Sri Lanka**

Since the peace process began in 2001, the LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] has engaged in targeted killings, kidnapping, hijackings of truck shipments, and forcible recruitment, including of children.

The LTTE forcibly recruited 543 children during the year. However, the LTTE also released 202 children, at least 96 of whom were again recruited. There were intermittent reports of children as young as eight years escaping from LTTE camps.

The LTTE used child soldiers and recruited children, sometimes forcibly, for use in battlefield support functions and in combat. LTTE recruits, some as young as eight years of age, escaped LTTE camps and surrendered to the military or the SLMM [Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission]. Credible reports indicated that in July the LTTE increased recruiting efforts, particularly in the east. Credible sources reported that there were more than 543 cases of forcible child recruitment by the LTTE. These sources also reported that more than 1,339 children remained in LTTE custody at year's end. Several sources reported that the LTTE continued to obstruct the 2003 action plan between UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] and the LTTE on the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers. Several sources reported that the LTTE used intimidation or bribes to facilitate recruitment. Some senior LTTE officials claimed that all child soldiers were volunteers.

### **Sudan**

The government continued forcibly to conscript citizens for military service as part of mandatory military service for male citizens, and government-allied forces and rebels continued to recruit and accept child soldiers in Darfur. Community leaders relayed unconfirmed reports that all sides to the conflict in Darfur recruited child soldiers. The UN [United Nations] Children's Fund (UNICEF) worked to raise awareness of the law and dangers in using child soldiers. As a result of its awareness campaign, more than 500 children have been released in Darfur; more than 200 of the children were attending UNICEF schools.

Government-allied militias and rebel forces conscripted or accepted young men and boys into the allied militias in Darfur. Although rebel factions forcibly conscripted citizens, including children, the SPLM/A [Sudan People's Liberation Movement Army] also continued to demobilize child soldiers.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that southern militias recruited child soldiers. Credible observers stated that southern tribal chiefs delivered children to the militias for recruitment goals in an effort not to give up their able-bodied fighters. The ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] and UNICEF worked to remove child soldiers from the South.

## **Tanzania**

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that children were recruited from the country's refugee camps for use as child soldiers.

## **Uganda**

During the year security forces killed and injured numerous civilians, including noncombatant children abducted by the LRA [Lord's Resistance Army], during anti-LRA operations in the northern and eastern parts of the country. Some observers charged that UPDF [Uganda People's Defense Forces] tactics, including extensive use of helicopter gunships, resulted in deaths and injuries to such children and that the UPDF failed to protect noncombatants during engagements with the LRA. The UPDF denied such allegations, noting that more than 80 percent of LRA fighters were child soldiers, which made it difficult to distinguish between combatants and noncombatants during engagements with the LRA.

The law prohibits service in the military by persons under 18 years of age; however, persons below the age of 18 occasionally enlisted, sometimes with the collusion of local officials. During the year there were reports that individuals under the age of 18 enlisted in the army and that others enlisted in local militias. The UPDF denied that it had actively recruited child soldiers, but stated some might have joined through deception or oversight.

There were reports that the UPDF used former LRA child soldiers on reconnaissance and intelligence missions. The LRA often forced abducted children into virtual slavery as guards, laborers, soldiers, and sex slaves.

Since December 2004 approximately 70 candidates were rejected by UPDF recruitment officers for being underage. Other reports indicated that the UPDF detained some former LRA child combatants for unacceptably long periods, and in some cases used them on intelligence and reconnaissance missions. According to UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] estimates, the LRA has abducted approximately 12 thousand children since 2002, and continued to abduct children during the year. The LRA forced children into virtual slavery as laborers, soldiers, guards, and sex slaves. In addition to being beaten, raped, and forced to march until exhausted, abducted children were forced to participate in the killing of other children who attempted to escape. More than 85 percent of LRA captives were made up of children whom the LRA abducted and forced to fight as rebels; most LRA rebels were between the ages of 11 and 16.

During the year the UPDF rescued 563 children from LRA captivity. The UPDF's Child Protection Unit provided treatment to returned abductees upon arrival at military facilities. The unit also escorted former abductees to NGO [non-governmental organization] facilities, which provided assistance and counseling to the children and their families. The government also worked closely with NGOs in the north to facilitate their assistance programs for amnesty seekers and rescued children; however, these programs were primarily financed by donors.

Approximately 35 thousand children, known as "night commuters", traveled from conflict areas or IDP [internally displaced persons] camps each night to urban centers to avoid abduction by the LRA. In September the UN estimated that nearly 9 thousand children commuted nightly into Gulu town and 10,847 commuted in Kitgum. During the year the government cooperated with NGOs to establish shelters for such children in tented dormitories and other semi-permanent structures; in other cases children slept under balconies or on the grounds of schools, churches, and hospitals. Conditions ranged

from harsh to adequate. There were credible reports that many displaced girls became involved in prostitution.