



State Department Reports on the Use of Child Soldiers

On March 6, 2007, 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, 23 of which were also mentioned in last year’s report. 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. In nine of the 25 countries, children were forcibly conscripted by government forces. In three of the 25 countries, children were reportedly used as human shields by both non-state and government forces. No new use of children in armed conflict was reported in four countries where children had been used in previous years and, unlike in previous years, the reports on Indonesia and Tanzania contained no mention of the use of child soldiers. Below are excerpts from the 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on the topic. For the full reports please see: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/>.

Afghanistan

A 2003 presidential decree prohibited the recruitment of children and young persons under the age of 22 into the army; in the middle of...[2006]...the legal recruitment age was changed to 18. There were unconfirmed reports of children under 18 falsifying their identification records to join the national security forces, which was a large-scale source of new employment opportunities during the year. There were no reports of forced child conscription. UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] maintained that efforts to assist the government in creating a national birth registry and ID system would greatly mitigate this problem.

Beginning in 2004 an estimated 8,000 former child soldiers were demobilized under a UNICEF-initiated program. This year UNICEF supported educational and skills training for over 3,750 demobilized child soldiers and other war-affected children (1,162 of which were girls) in eight provinces. Since 2004, over 12,090 children affected by war have been supported through UNICEF's reintegration project in 28 provinces.

Militants used women and children as human shields by forcing them into the line of fire.

Algeria

In May [2006], the bodies of 22 children were found in the province of Jijel. They were alleged to have been used as human shields by the GSPC [Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat].

Angola

The government, assisted by the World Bank and UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund], continued to implement its post-conflict child soldier protection strategy. Under 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.

Belarus

As an alternative to orphanages, the law allows military units to adopt and train orphan boys between the ages of 14 and 16, an accepted practice that continues. While the children are not enlisted in the military, they must comply with military rules, wear a uniform, and obey orders. They have the option to join the unit upon reaching the draft age of 18.

Burma

The official age of enlistment in the army is 18 years. The government stated that its official policy is to avoid conscripting child soldiers; however, recruiters frequently ignored the policy. In 2004, the government established the Committee for Prevention Against Recruitment of Minors for Military Service, which purportedly issued rules and regulations to punish those who recruit child soldiers.

On Aug. 22 [2006], SPDC [State Peace and Development Council] Secretary 1 Lt. Gen. Thein Sein told the committee that minors themselves were to blame for the problem because they lied about their true

age or did not inform their parents that they had enlisted in the armed forces. Thein Sein claimed that when parents came to military camps to take back their underage sons, the children often were returned after the cases were investigated. In a tacit admission that there remained underage soldiers in the armed forces, Thein Sein stated that soldiers with stunted growth were not sent to forward areas but were instead given light work duties at military bases, and that illiterate youth were sent to army schools to be educated.

According to Ministry of Defense sources, the army discharged 55 soldiers between February and May, including four who were underage. A separate Ministry of Foreign Affairs report in November stated that as of September the army had discharged 16 new recruits, four of whom were underage. On Oct. 24 [2006], the government gave the ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] a list of 17 complaints of recruitment of underage soldiers and declared the cases were all resolved.

The army continued to use forced recruitment of child soldiers. On March 21 [2006], government soldiers detained 17 year old Maung Han Zaw who lived in Tharkayta Township, Rangoon Division. A few days later his parents traveled to Military Training School Number 5 at Yai Ni near Pyinmana to bring their son home. The commanding officer, Capt. Aye Thit, allowed them to meet their son but would not permit him to return home.

In May [2006], a unit of Light Infantry Brigade 365, commanded by Sgt. Maj. Thein Tun, reportedly lured 11 ethnic Chin boys from an orphanage in Myoma Ward, Tiddim, Chin State. After forcing them to work at Kalemyo airport, the soldiers transported the orphans to a military camp in Kalemyo, Sagaing Division, to become soldiers. Two older boys who tried to escape were punished and transferred to Kalewa military camp. One of the older boys, Vung Ki Thang, was reported to be only 15 years old.

On Aug. 3 [2006], police at Meiktila, Mandalay Division, reportedly arrested three 15 year old children—Than Naing Aye, Lin Lin, and Yan Lin Maung—on charges of theft. On Aug. 22 [2006], police officer Min Aung Thein reportedly sold the children to Taung Thone Lone army recruitment center in Mandalay for \$50 (65,000 kyat).

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 had become less common. The government invited UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] to visit military recruitment centers, but UNICEF declined because it deemed government organized tours to be of little value. UNICEF offered to help reintegrate discharged underage soldiers into society and to conduct awareness workshops for trainers of military recruiters in international humanitarian law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the country's child laws, and HIV/AIDS. The government did not formally respond to UNICEF's offer.

Ethnic minority cease fire groups and insurgent armies, particularly the United Wa State Army, also forcibly conscripted child soldiers. Field observers reported seeing numerous Wa soldiers who clearly were underage. Inaccessibility to the areas where these groups operated made it difficult to obtain reliable data on the extent of the problem among ethnic armies.

In January, the government claimed that a group of soldiers who surrendered from the SSA S [Shan State Army-South] included several teenagers, of whom the youngest, Pvt. Sai Yi, was 13 years old. Col. Yot Suk, head of SSA S, denied that any of his soldiers were under the age of 18.

During the year representatives of the KNU [Karen National Union] and the KNPP [Karenni National Progressive Party], two ethnic resistance groups, met with UNICEF and UNHCR [United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees] representatives in Thailand to request that they be removed from the list of groups who recruited child soldiers. Admitting that the KNU recruited child soldiers as recently as 2000, the KNU spokesperson claimed that the KNU had adopted a policy not to accept underage recruits. However, the spokesperson acknowledged the possibility that low level officers in the field could have continued to recruit children. On July 31 [2006], the KNU wrote to the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict to request that the UN remove it from the list of armed groups who use child soldiers. The KNU claimed it was against their policy to recruit underage soldiers and said it would take action against anyone who recruited underage children into their armed wing. The KNPP spokesperson said his group sent underage volunteers to school.

In August, a spokesperson for the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers noted that the government remained very secretive about child recruitment problems, while the KNU and the KNPP held open discussions on the issue. The spokesperson estimated that there were fewer than 50 child soldiers in the two ethnic armies.

Burundi

The PALIPEHUTU-FNL [Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People/National Liberation Front] continued to commit numerous serious human rights abuses against civilians, including killings, indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, kidnappings, rapes, theft, extortion, the forcible recruitment and employment of children as soldiers, and the use of forced labor.

According to UNICEF, security forces no longer used 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. According to HRW [Human Rights Watch], security forces required children who were child soldiers with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL to carry munitions for the military and assist in locating PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants and supporters.

The PALIPEHUTU-FNL continued to use and recruit child soldiers, although in fewer numbers than in previous years.

In May [2006], HRW conducted interviews with detained children. HRW reported that approximately 65 children, alleged PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants or supporters of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL, were in government custody. Some of them had deserted the PALIPEHUTU-FNL and turned themselves in, hoping to be released into society. Others were captured by government soldiers or were arrested by police officers during searches for PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants. In June [2006], HRW estimated that there could be up to hundreds of children still actively engaged with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL in need of demobilization and reintegration.

Chad

The law prohibits the use of child soldiers; however, there were unconfirmed reports that young males were recruited by security forces during the year.

In October [2006], the independent press accused the government of using child soldiers and published photos of youths engaged in a military campaign in the southern town of Am Timan. In December 2005, unconfirmed reports of the 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.

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Colombia

The law prohibits service in the public security forces before age 18, and government practice conformed with the law. Guerrillas forcibly recruited and used children as soldiers. 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. Human Rights Watch stated there were approximately 11,000 child soldiers, 80 percent of whom belonged to the FARC and the ELN [National Liberation Army].

A 2002 UNICEF study estimated that 83 percent of child soldiers volunteered and did so because of limited educational and economic opportunities and a desire for acceptance and camaraderie. 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 396 children (225 of them former members of the FARC) surrendered to state security forces during the year and were transferred to the ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute], which operated a reintegration program for former child soldiers. While child labor remained a problem, in October President Uribe signed the Law of Children and Adolescents, which raised the minimum age for work from 14 to 15 years of age.

Although there were no reports of forced child labor in the formal economy, several thousand children were forced to serve as paramilitary or guerrilla combatants.

Cote d'Ivoire

Both pro-government militias and rebel forces continued to recruit and use children as soldiers, both on a voluntary and a forced basis.

ONUCI [United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire]'s human rights office reported fewer child soldiers in NF [rebel "New Forces"] ranks and the release of many during the year.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

A March 16 [2006] MONUC [United Nations Mission in the Congo] report found widespread illegal arrest and detention of minors, particularly street children and children associated with armed groups. Although the recruitment or retention of child soldiers is illegal, military authorities sometimes arrested demobilized child soldiers on charges of desertion and tried them in military courts. Civilian courts on occasion tried child soldiers for possessing illegal arms, even though they had been illegally recruited as combatants.

Security forces and armed groups continued to recruit and maintain child soldiers in their ranks. A June 13 [2006] report of the UN secretary general on children and armed conflict in the country, which covered the period July 2005 to May [2006], found continued recruitment and use of children in security forces and armed groups. Perpetrators included transitional government security forces, FARDC [Congolese

national army] forces allied with renegade Gen. Nkunda and not under central command authority, Mai Mai militia, and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

At year's end [2006], more than 20,000 children, including nearly 3,000 girls, had been demobilized from government security services and armed groups. NGOs [non-governmental organizations] estimated that as many as 30,000 children were once associated with armed groups. Although there were no reliable statistics, most credible sources, including the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), estimated that at least 3,000 children had yet to be demobilized and remained in the ranks of or held by armed groups. According to an October [2006] AI [Amnesty International] report, girls accounted for 15 to 40 percent of the child soldiers, but in some areas they constituted less than 2 percent of child soldiers demobilized. AI attributed the discrepancy to a belief by NGOs working with child soldiers that girls among armed groups were either dependents or "wives" of adult fighters.

Recruitment of children began as young as age six, according to AI. Some children were forcibly recruited, while others enrolled for food, protection, or to escape poverty. Child soldiers faced violence from older soldiers and armed conflict. They were also exploited as porters or sex slaves.

Unlike in 2005, there were no reports that local authorities attempted to recruit child soldiers for armed groups.

FARDC brigades not under central command authority recruited children for Gen. Nkunda in North Kivu Province during the year. Soldiers ordered new child recruits to recruit other children, sometimes at gunpoint. At least 70 children were recruited in this way. MONUC reported an additional 170 children present in the 84th Brigade under Col. Akilimali and the 85th Brigade under Col. Samy.

FARDC elements allied with renegade Gen. Nkunda and not under central command authority also re-recruited children. For example, according to MONUC, soldiers of the 835th Battalion abducted 13 demobilized children near Kitchanga in Masisi (North Kivu Province) on June 22. On July 30, these soldiers traced two ex-child soldiers to their homes and tried to persuade them to return. Child protection NGOs stopped reunifying children with families in Masisi due to the risk of re-recruitment.

Armed groups, including Mai Mai, continued to abduct and forcibly recruit children to serve as forced laborers, porters, combatants, war wives, and sex slaves. Credible estimates of the total number of children associated with armed groups, many of whom were between the ages of 14 and 16, varied widely from 15,000 to 30,000 in 2005. Credible sources estimated that at least 3,000 child soldiers had not yet been demobilized countrywide by year's end.

Girls associated with armed groups were often assaulted, raped, and infected with HIV/AIDS.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports of uniformed armed men recruiting Congolese children in two Rwandan refugee camps for use as soldiers.

The FDLR [Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda], largely made up of Rwandan Hutus who fled to the DRC in 1994 after the Rwandan genocide, continued to be led by individuals responsible for executing and fomenting the genocide...FDLR fighters continued to commit abuses against civilians, including killings, abductions, rapes, and recruitment of child soldiers.

Militias in the Ituri District of Orientale Province, notably the Front for National Integration (FNI), the Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC), and the Front for Patriotic Resistance in Ituri (FPRI)

continued to commit abuses against civilians, including killings, abductions, rapes, and child soldier recruitment.

On March 17, the transitional government transferred custody of Thomas Lubanga of the Ituri militia Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) to the ICC [International Criminal Court], which had indicted him in February for war crimes and crimes against humanity for conscription and recruitment of child soldiers.

Mai Mai militia groups in the provinces of Katanga, South Kivu, and North Kivu continued to commit abuses against civilians, including killings, abductions, rapes, and child soldier recruitment.

CONADER [the national disarmament agency] used media, posters, and brochures to campaign against child soldiering.

India

Civil society and media alleged there was trafficking in child soldiers by Naxalites and "Salwa Judum" activists. NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in Chhattisgarh also criticized the practice of hiring teenage children of police personnel slain in Naxalite attacks as "child police" (the children were not given actual policing duty, but ran errands in police stations). Several such "Bal-police" continued to be employed in police stations in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

Iraq

Press reports indicated that insurgents used children in diversionary tactics to distract security forces, as well as informers and messengers. Children sometimes participated directly in attacks as well, reportedly under the direction of Jaysh al-Mahdi [the Mahdi Army] militia, throwing rocks or other objects at security convoys.

Israel and OT

The IDF [Israeli Defense Force] allegedly used minors as human shields; Palestinian terrorist groups used minors to conduct attacks, smuggle weapons, or act as human shields. On July 17, according to B'Tselem, during an incursion by Israeli forces into Beit Hanun in the northern Gaza Strip, IDF soldiers seized control of two buildings and used six residents, two of whom were minors (ages 14 and 16) as human shields (see section 1.g.). On Feb. 2, the IDF arrested a 15-year-old and a 16-year-old Palestinian boy at the Huwwara checkpoint, near Nablus, as they attempted to smuggle 11 pipe bombs into Israel.

Nepal

Before the cease-fire, Maoists used civilians, including children, as human shields in wave attacks against fortified military positions. Both sides in the conflict used children as informants. The Nov. 21 [2006] peace agreement forbids the use of children under the age of 18 as soldiers in the armies of either side; however, the Maoists continued to recruit large numbers of children after signing this agreement.

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 within a

few days, but some remained with the Maoists, either voluntarily or under compulsion. The Maoists denied recruiting children. The NA [Nepal Army] estimated that 30 percent of Maoist guerillas were under the age of 18, and some were as young as 10. The Nov. 21 peace agreement expressly forbade the recruitment of children into the armed forces of either side, but the Maoists continued to recruit children in large numbers.

Maoists forcibly recruited children, including girls, as soldiers, human shields, runners, and messengers.

Paraguay

On June 20, Defense Minister Roberto Gonzalez, then commanding general of the Armed Forces Jose Kanazawa, and then Foreign Minister Leila Rachid officially apologized on behalf of the government for the deaths in 1989 and 1995 of two minors -- Gerardo Vargas Areco and Victor Hugo Maciel -- conscripted into the military.

The government requires that all military officers responsible for recruiting ensure that all conscripts meet the legal minimum age of 18.

Philippines

During the year the NPA [New People's Army] and ASG [Abu Sayyaf Group] targeted children for recruitment as combatants and noncombatants. There were an estimated 2,000 child soldiers in the country. By mid-year, an International Labor Organization (ILO)-led program demobilized and reintegrated into society 300 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 (Chechnya)

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

Rwanda

The UNHCR [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees] reported one instance of suspected recruitment of children for forced labor or child soldiering from a Rwandan camp for Congolese refugees by a DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo]-based armed group.

During the year there was one report of a DRC-based armed group recruiting between 20 and 30 children from a Rwandan refugee camp to be used as combatants or forced laborers. The government responded to the alleged incident by sending counselors from the National Demobilization and Reintegration Committee to the camp to educate the refugee population on the dangers of child soldiering.

Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the RDF [Rwanda Defense Forces] was involved in the recruitment by Congo-based militias of children from Rwandan refugee camps for use as soldiers.

The government continued to support a demobilization and reintegration program. During the year 58 children who had served as soldiers in the DRC received care and reintegration preparation from the Muhazi demobilization center for children in the Eastern Province.

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 returned to their villages and reentered civil society.

Somalia

There were reports of militias recruiting children, and reports that the Islamic Courts used child soldiers in recruiting efforts and rallies.

Children remained among the chief victims of the continuing societal violence. From March to July in Mogadishu, more than 30 children were reported killed as a result of the conflict between the ARPCT [Alliance for Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism] and the Islamic Courts. Boys as young as 14 or 15 participated in militia attacks, and many youths were members of the marauding gangs known as moryaan (parasites or maggots). The UN's annual report on Children and Armed Conflict documented grave violations against children in the country. The report focused on violations systematically committed against children: killing and maiming; recruitment and use of children as soldiers; attacks on schools and hospitals; rape and other severe sexual violence against children; abduction; and denial of humanitarian access.

The Somaliland Constitution contains no minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces, but there were no reports of minors in its forces. An inadequate system of birth registration made it difficult to establish the exact age of recruits.

The recruitment and use of children in militias and other fighting forces is a longstanding practice in the country, and recruitment of children increased significantly during the year. UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] reported that children as young as 11 were found at checkpoints and in the vehicles of various parties to the conflict in Mogadishu. The militias of warlords Abdi Qeybidid and Musa Sudi Yalahow recruited children as young as 13. The Islamic Courts, in the name of jihad, significantly increased the identification and training of new recruits and publicly declared their intention to recruit from schools. In September, headmasters from Mogadishu schools were summoned to meetings at which they were required to commit to a quota of children from each school for a three-to-six-month training. In October [2006], recruitment of boys and girls from schools in Mogadishu began. UNICEF reported that students would be forcibly conscripted if there were not enough volunteers.

Sri Lanka

The LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] 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 February the LTTE and Karuna faction increased recruiting efforts, particularly in the east. Credible sources reported that there were more than 450 cases of forcible child recruitment by the LTTE. The Karuna faction of the LTTE forcibly recruited an estimated 200 children. These sources also reported that more than 1,000 children remained in LTTE custody at year's end. Several sources reported that the LTTE continued to obstruct the 2003 action plan between UNICEF 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.

The LTTE used children as young as age 13 years in battle, and children as young as eight often were recruited forcibly.

A UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund]-supported action plan sought to restore normalcy to former LTTE child soldiers through release and reintegration. Under this program, UNICEF supported the establishment of a transit center in Kilinochchi for child recruits released by the LTTE.

The LTTE forcibly recruited 451 children during the year [2006]. However, the LTTE also released 80 children, at least 52 of whom were again recruited. There were intermittent reports of children as young as eight years escaping from LTTE camps.

There were reports that the government provided protection and military aid to Karuna and his cadres to assist them in their fight against LTTE cadre. The government denied any connection to Karuna and his cadres.

Sudan

Factions of the SLA [Sudan Liberation Army], the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and other rebel groups in Darfur committed killings, beatings, abductions, rape, robbery, destruction of property, forcible conscription, and recruitment of child soldiers.

The government continued forcibly to conscript citizens for military service as part of mandatory military service for male citizens, and government-aligned forces and rebels continued to recruit and accept child soldiers in Darfur.

The SPLA [Sudan People's Liberation Army] also continued to recruit child soldiers.

Recruitment of child soldiers was a serious problem in the country. On Aug. 17, the UN issued the Report of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflict in the Sudan, which cited the recruitment of child soldiers by the SAF [Sudanese Armed Forces], SPLA, and the White Army [a Nuer ethnic militia]. In Darfur, the UN report cited recruitment of child soldiers by the SLA (Minawi) [faction of the Sudan Liberation Army] and janjaweed. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) worked to raise awareness of the law and of the dangers in using child soldiers. As a result of its awareness campaign, more than 500 child soldiers were released in Darfur; more than 200 of the children were attending UNICEF schools.

Uganda

The law prohibits service in the military by persons under 18 years of age; however, there were reports that individuals under the age of 18 enlisted in the army and in local militias, sometimes in collusion with local officials. On June 16 [2006], the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict stated that an estimated 5,000 children were serving in the country's armed forces. The UPDF [Uganda People's Defense Forces] denied that it had actively recruited child soldiers, but stated some might have joined through deception or oversight.

There continued to be reports that the UPDF detained some former LRA [Lord's Resistance Army] child combatants for long periods, and in some cases may have used them in intelligence and reconnaissance missions.

The LRA used children as soldiers, held children and others in slave like conditions, and subjected female captives to rape and other forms of severe sexual exploitation. Thousands of 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 and to escape systemic social problems such as poverty and domestic violence, although their numbers dropped substantially throughout the year as regional security improved.

According to the UN Childrens Fund (UNICEF), the LRA and other rebel groups have abducted approximately 38,000 persons since 1986; however, LRA abductions decreased during the year after the LRA's leadership was driven from the north by the UPDF. An estimated 205 persons were abducted since January [2006]. Unlike in previous years, abductions typically were generally temporary in nature, and abductees were used more frequently as porters for LRA supplies than as combatants. However, some abductees continued to be trained as guerillas. In previous years, most victims were children and young adults whom the LRA forced into slavery as laborers, soldiers, guards, and sex slaves.

On June 16 [2006], Voice of America radio quoted Radhika Coomaraswamy, the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, as stating that an estimated 5,000 children are serving in the armed forces in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The government denied recruitment of children in the army.

According to UNICEF, the LRA has abducted approximately 12,000 children since 2002 and continued to abduct children during the year [2006]. 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 [2006], the UPDF rescued 114 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 facilities, which provided assistance and counseling to the children and their families. The government also worked closely with NGOs [non-governmental organizations] in the north to facilitate their assistance programs for amnesty seekers and rescued children; however, these programs were primarily financed by donors.

Improved security in the north contributed to significant reductions in the number of children known as "night commuters" who traveled from conflict areas or IDP camps each night to urban centers to avoid

abduction by the LRA. UNICEF reported that as of Dec. 2 [2006], 700 commuters sought shelter in Kitgum and Gulu; approximately 35,000 were regular night commuters in 2005. A June [2006] UNICEF study indicated that children continued to commute due to reasons other than LRA activity, such as endemic poverty and domestic violence. During the year the government cooperated with NGOs to operate 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.