

State Department Reports on the Use of Child Soldiers

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On Feb. 28, 2005, the U.S. State Department released its annual Country Reports on Human Rights. 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 are used; among the worst violators continue to be Burma, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka and Uganda. Belarus and Russia are new to the report, while past references to child soldiers in Libya, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and the Republic of Congo did not make an appearance this year. Also absent is Iraq, as the State Department's report did not mention the use of child soldiers under the watch of either the Coalition Provisional Authority or Iraqi Governing Council during the year.

Below are excerpts from the 2004 State Department Human Rights Reports relating to the use of children in armed conflict. For the full report please see <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/index.htm>.

Afghanistan

“In May 2003, President [Hamid] Karzai issued a decree that prohibited the recruitment of children and young persons under the age of 22 to the Afghan National Army. UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] initiated a program that demobilized and reintegrated approximately 5,000 of an estimated 8,000 former child soldiers. Afghan militias, including the Taliban and Northern Alliance, used child soldiers in past years.”

Angola

“Unlike in previous years, there were no confirmed reports that children were recruited into the armed forces. According to the Ministry of Justice, over 3.8 million children were registered locally between August 2001 and March [2004] in a campaign to limit the exploitation of children. By March, the UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] supported National Family Tracing and Reunification Program had identified 11,076 separated children and successfully reunited 3,670 children with their families.

“The Government, assisted by UNICEF, continued implementation of the 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, and were guaranteed to not be recruited or reenlisted in the military. During the year, the World Bank also began assisting with the implementation of this strategy.”

Belarus

“On February 23 [2004], the Government enacted a law allowing military units to adopt and train orphans between the ages of 14 and 16. The orphans may not be enrolled as servicemen while still children. The Government committed itself to providing free food, clothing, housing, education, medical care, and cash allowances. These children are required to comply with the rules of the military units where they live, wear a uniform, obey orders, and join the unit upon reaching the draft age of 18.”

Burma

“Forced child labor remained a serious problem, despite recent ordinances outlawing the practice. The forced use of citizens as porters by the military - including mistreatment, illness, and sometimes death - continued, as did forced recruitment of child soldiers.

“Ethnic armed groups including the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South) also reportedly committed human rights abuses, including killings, rapes, forced labor, and conscription

of child soldiers, although on a lesser scale than the Government. According to a 2002 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, government troops conscripted children as young as the age of 11.

“The official age of enlistment in the army is 18 years. In the past, army recruitment drives have targeted children to meet quotas for the ostensibly all volunteer army, but anecdotal evidence, at least in Rangoon, suggests this practice is now not as common. Nevertheless, there was evidence of forced recruitment of child soldiers by the army.

“Ethnic minority cease-fire and insurgent groups also forcibly conscripted child soldiers, and there were numbers of child soldiers with these forces, particularly the United Wa State Army.

“In his report on January 5 [2004], the UNSRHR [United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights] expressed "deep concern about reported cases of boys forcibly recruited by the military... they range in age from 14 to 16 years old and were sent to support military activities in some ethnic area." He further noted, "worrying indications that... this practice may be widespread among government troops as well as among insurgent armies." On that same day, the Government established the Committee for Preventing Recruitment of Child Soldiers, which met again on August 4 [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 March and April [2004], the ILO [International Labor Organization] 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 investigated 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.

“The June [2004] U.N. [United Nations] Committee on the Rights of the Child report welcomed the establishment of the Government's child soldier committee, but noted the 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."

“According to a U.N. source, on November 12 [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 Government's Committee for Preventing Recruitment of Child Soldiers.

“A 14-year-old boy was picked up by a trishaw driver while en route home from school in November 2002 and "enlisted" in the Army. The boy's parents wrote to the newly established Committee for Preventing Recruitment of Child Soldiers in April and were able to trace their son to an Army post in Lashio (Shan State). His Battalion Commander was subsequently ordered by the Directorate of Military Training to send the young soldier to a Military Language School in Shan State. The parents now know where their son is located, although he is not with them.

“In 2002, an M.P. [Member of Parliament]-elect from Karen State filed a police report that a 15-year-old boy was missing minutes after arriving in Rangoon railway station. The Rangoon police suggested looking for him at the Hmawby army recruit camp near Rangoon, where the M.P.-elect found three sets of parents also looking for their children. Six boys were brought forward and the M.P.-elect was able to identify and retrieve the boy.

“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, CARE, UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund], the U.N. Development Program, and foreign governments. UNICEF expanded its operations in May to open a separate child protection section. On July 12-13 [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.”

Burundi

“Under the law, the country's minimum age for military recruitment is 16, although the Transitional Government has stated that no one under 18 was recruited; however, throughout the year, there were reports that security forces and former rebel groups continued to have child soldiers in their ranks, despite the participation of all of these groups in a joint government-UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] project to demobilize and reintegrate children into their communities. No reliable figures were available on the exact number of child soldiers in the security forces, GP militia, and former rebel groups, and estimates varied significantly among different organizations and changed during the year, in part to reflect the reported results of demobilization.

“In May [2004], UNICEF estimated that approximately 3,000 child soldiers were serving in government forces or former rebel groups. According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, there were reports during the year that the FAB [Burundian Armed Forces] continued to use children as domestic laborers, spies, and in combat; however, in June [2004], the FAB reportedly ceased conscripting children and - along with some former rebel groups - reportedly removed child soldiers from combat units. During the year, there continued to be reports that some former rebel groups continued to recruit and use child soldiers.

“According to a U.N. [United Nations] news agency, some children joined the FAB voluntarily by using fraudulent documents such as birth certificates. In previous years, according to HRW [Human Rights Watch], children voluntarily attached themselves to military units. Most of these children were orphans or IDPs [internally displaced persons] who had no independent means of survival. Some observers believed the FAB allowed these children to perform menial tasks such as cooking in army encampments.

“The country's U.N. and World Bank-supported process to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate former soldiers and former rebels began in December [2003].

“On January 26 [2004], the Transitional Government demobilized 24 child soldiers as it officially launched the National Structure for the Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Prevention of Child Soldiers (National Structure). By year's end, the National Structure had demobilized and reintegrated 2,913 child soldiers, of which more than 2,000 came from the FAB and the GP [Guardians of the Peace] militia, and 632 from former rebel groups. By October, all six former rebel groups, including the CNDD-FDD [National Council for Defense of Democracy–Forces for the Defense of Democracy], had joined the child soldier demobilization effort.

“The PALIPEHUTU-FNL [Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People/National Liberation Front] continued to use and recruit child soldiers, and according to HRW, children were among the PALIPEHUTU-FNL combatants in the August 13 [2004] Gatumba massacre.

“Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that children were kidnapped by rebels and then used as child soldiers.

“During the year, Burundi was a source and transit country for children trafficked for the purpose of forced soldiering, and there were reports of coerced sexual exploitation of women by both government soldiers and rebel combatants. The trafficking of child soldiers by both the CNDD-FDD and the PALIPEHUTU-FNL within the country was a problem.”

Central African Republic

“During the year, no actions were taken against soldiers loyal to the former [President Ange-Felix] Patasse government or pro-[former Armed Forces Chief of Staff General Francois] Bozize fighters who committed serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, including widespread looting; rape; abductions resulting in disappearances; inhumane, cruel, and degrading treatment; and the recruitment and use of children as soldiers prior to and during the March 2003 coup.

“There were no reports of child soldiers in the ranks of the armed forces. Those recruited by persons loyal to former President Patasse in 2003 were limited in number, and there were no further reports that children were in the military.”

Chad

“The use of child soldiers is prohibited by law, and according to UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] protection officers, the use of child soldiers was not widespread. Although reliable information about the use of child soldiers was difficult to obtain, UNICEF estimated in 2003 that there were approximately 600 child soldiers reportedly serving in government security forces and armed groups in the country; however, the number of child soldiers was believed to have decreased during the year, and no further recruitment of children for use as soldiers was reported.”

Colombia

“At least 223 children were kidnapped during the year. On February 10 [2004], for example, the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia] kidnapped a 9-year-old girl from a school bus in Candelaria, Valle del Cauca Department. They released her on February 21.

“On July 14 [2004], after receiving an undisclosed ransom from former Senator Jaime Losada, the FARC released his sons, Jamie Felipe and Juan Sebastian, who were kidnapped from their apartment in Neiva, Huila Department in 2001. Their mother remained in FARC captivity at year's end.

“Persons under 18 are prohibited from serving in the public security forces; however, both paramilitaries and guerrillas used child soldiers. In October [2004], the IOM [International Organization for Migration] estimated that between 6,000 and 11,000 children in the country were members of illegal armed groups; UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] reported that the number was as high as 14,000. The Ministry of Defense estimated that 40 percent of FARC members were minors and that most guerrilla fighters had joined the FARC ranks as children.

“Although paramilitaries continued to employ child soldiers, paramilitary groups turned over at least 70 minors to government authorities during the year, either as signs of good faith or as conditions of formal demobilization. For example, on December 18 [2004], 26 minors demobilized with the AUC's [United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia] Calima Bloc.

“Although many minors were recruited forcibly, a 2002 study by UNICEF found that 83 percent of child soldiers volunteered. Limited educational and economic opportunities and a desire for acceptance and camaraderie increased the appeal of service in armed groups. 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 529 children surrendered to state security forces during the year. Illegal armed groups frequently threatened children to thwart them from leaving terrorist ranks. For example, in October [2004], three former child soldiers described how the AUC forced them to march several days to an isolated training camp, where they were told they would be tortured and their families killed if they tried

to escape. FARC child deserters also reported that local guerrilla commanders threatened to kill their families should they desert or attempt to do so. A reinsertion program for former child soldiers administered by the ICBF [Colombian Family Welfare Institute] provided assistance to 505 children during the year. The remaining 24 children received assistance from their indigenous communities.

“Paramilitary groups released some child soldiers as a prelude to demobilizations negotiated with the Government.”

Congo, Democratic Republic of the

“The FARDC [Congolese Armed Forces] and other armed groups continued to have child soldiers in their ranks. During the year, the Government demobilized an estimated 3,080 children, and there were no reports that the Government actively recruited children; however, there were numerous reports that it provided support to Mai Mai groups, which continued to recruit and use child soldiers. The Government continued to collaborate with UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] and other partners to demobilize child soldiers, participated in an international program to demobilize child soldiers, and finalized the national demobilization and disarmament committee's plan for children associated with armed groups.

“In areas under marginal 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 30,000, many of whom were very young, including a 7-year-old boy who served with PUSIC [Party for the Safeguarding of the Congo]. Armed groups continued to abduct and forcibly recruit children to serve as forced laborers, porters, combatants, "war wives," and sex slaves.

“The MONUC [United Nations Observer Mission in Congo] Ituri report found that all Ituri armed groups had "recruited and trained children to turn them into combatants." According to some estimates, during the year, 40 percent of each Ituri militia force may have been composed of children under 18, and estimates suggested that 6,000 children belonged to armed groups, with several thousand others possibly involved in local defense groups. The MONUC Ituri report indicated that children have been used as combatants, laborers in the illegal exploitation of natural resources, domestic labor, and sexual slaves. The report also noted that there have been several allegations that Uganda and Rwanda have aided and abetted Ituri armed groups to recruit and train children. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported that armed groups continued to use approximately 2,000 Rwandan children as soldiers in Ituri District.

“During the year, children were voluntarily and forcibly recruited into armed groups; however, no reliable data was available on the number of children recruited willingly versus forcibly. Many children joined an armed group based on their ethnic origins and their places in shifting military alliances; however, most made calculated decisions about their best chances for survival and aligned with whichever group looked most likely to support them.

“In anticipation of promised salaries for those soldiers who integrated in the national army, some commanders of armed groups reportedly recruited child soldiers during the first part of the year and regularly diverted the salaries of child soldiers for their own gain.

“During the year, armed groups pursued several recruitment targets and engaged in forced recruitment and recruitment of previously demobilized child soldiers. Credible sources reported that in May and June [2004], former Mundundu-40 commanders allied with ex-RCD/G [Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma] combatants recruited previously demobilized children in and around Bukavu.

“In May [2004], the FARDC arrested former Mundundu-40 Commander Biyoyo for unauthorized recruitment of soldiers, including minors. However, Biyoyo was given a provisional release and was said to have fled the country. Biyoyo's former Operations Chief, Antunov, threatened minors who testified against Biyoyo and aggressively targeted them for recruitment in mid-June. Although some children returned to their homes or went to child demobilization centers, some reported for duty out of fear.

“In June [2004], ex-RCD/G elements led by former commanders such as General Nkunda and Colonel Mutebusi recruited children in North and South Kivu, notably in Minova, Kalehe, and Masisi, to serve as soldiers. In September, ex-ANC [National Army of Congo] forces in Ngungu kidnapped and forcibly recruited a 12-year-old boy, who, after a week of military training in Masisi, was sent to Walikale to serve as a soldier. A U.N. [United Nations] expert panel on resource exploitation reported that, in mid-year, Rwandan officials attempted to recruit demobilized Rwandan and Congolese soldiers and Congolese refugees in support of ex-RCD/G combatants; however, the Rwandan Government denied these claims. In addition to offering enrollment incentives, Rwandan officials, Nkunda, and other Congolese officials reportedly pursued recruitment aims through the use of intimidation tactics. For example, in late June [2004], local sources reported that Nkunda forcibly recruited soldiers, including children in Kalehe, by threatening to shoot those who did not volunteer. In addition, credible sources reported that an unknown number of children were recruited out of refugee camps in Rwanda. There were also unconfirmed reports that some children recruited by ex-RCD/G elements following former commanders such as General Nkunda and Colonel Mutebusi were sent to Rwanda for training; however, these reports had not been independently confirmed by year's end.

“Children were often treated brutally if they failed to obey orders. Child soldiers recruited by Mai Mai in Maniema Province told the U.N. Special Rapporteur that they were subjected to severe punishment by their superiors and had been initiated into war using fetishist rituals involving cannibalism. Some children were beaten or placed in detention for falling asleep while on guard duty, wasting ammunition, failure to obey orders, or desertion. In detention, they were often tortured and otherwise ill-treated. For example, in May [2004], AI [Amnesty International] reported that approximately 20 former RCD/G child soldiers were being held in overcrowded conditions with poor

sanitation and food in Goma. Some were held for military offenses. In one case, according to the MONUC Ituri report, a child was executed.

“Girls associated with armed groups were often assaulted, raped, and infected with HIV/AIDS. In Ituri, girls have been utilized as foot soldiers, domestics, and sex slaves. The MONUC Ituri report found that all Ituri armed groups recruited girls, often forcibly, into their ranks. Once released, denial, shame, and fear prevented many of them from seeking assistance.

“During the year, armed groups demobilized 3,080 child soldiers with assistance from MONUC, UNICEF, and NGOs [non-governmental organizations].

“Children, including child soldiers, were involved in the illegal exploitation of natural resources in Ituri District to the benefit of their militia commanders. In December 2003, MONUC visited gold mines in UPC [Union of Congolese Patriots]-controlled Iga Barriere and FNI [Front for the National Integration]-controlled Kilo-Etat. At Iga Barriere (the former headquarters of the Kilo Moto Mining Company), MONUC found that three quarters of the mine pit team were under the age of 18, most between 11 and 15. Reportedly, the children were all active or former child soldiers who worked on behalf of their UPC commanders. An FNI commander admitted he had 12 children, including an 11-year-old, in his armed group, and there were many child soldiers at a nearby mine. There were continued reports that re-recruitment of former child soldiers took place to secure mine labor for armed groups. There continued to be reports that, often because of economic necessity, children worked in mines extracting colombo-tantalite ore, or coltan, used to make mobile telephones.”

Côte d’Ivoire

“There were corroborated reports that the rebels forcibly conscripted locals to join their ranks. Those who refused reportedly disappeared. Many of the conscripts were youth or children, although there also were reports that many volunteered to join the rebels.

“A knowledgeable U.N. [United Nations] representative reported that in government-held territory, it was common for pro-government militias to recruit children, both on a voluntary and a forced basis.

“There were credible reports that the rebel forces that controlled the north and the west used child soldiers. NGOs [non-governmental organizations] reported that in the west, rebel forces were actively recruiting child soldiers from refugee camps and other areas. In the north, many rebel soldiers volunteered at ages 15 or younger. In September [2004], the local representatives of UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund] and U.N. OCHA [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs], visited Bouake in rebel-controlled territory, informed the special representative of the U.N. Secretary-General in the country that the situation of child soldiers in Bouake was improving, and 752 children were being cared for by the "Children's House," a local organization, with the assistance of the local office of the WFP [Witness for Peace].”

Israel and the occupied territories

“Palestinian terrorist groups used minors to conduct attacks or as human shields. On January 11 [2004], a 17-year-old high school student from Nablus blew himself up near an army post at Jinsafut; no IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] soldiers were hurt. On November 1 [2004], a 16-year-old Palestinian bomber blew himself up in a Tel Aviv marketplace, killing three Israeli civilians.”

Korea, Democratic People’s Republic of

“Like others in society, children were the objects of intense political indoctrination; even mathematics textbooks propound party dogma. In addition, foreign visitors and academic sources reported that children from an early age were subjected to several hours a week of mandatory military training and indoctrination at their schools. School children sometimes were sent to work in factories or in the fields for short periods to assist in completing special projects or in meeting production goals.”

Liberia

“More than 11,000 children were disarmed and demobilized during UNMIL's [United Nations Mission in Liberia] DDDR [disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration] program. ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] efforts to reunite children who had been separated from their families during the war, including child soldiers, continued during the year. At year's end [2004], approximately 145 children had been reunited with their families; an estimated 300 children remained scattered within the country and in refugee camps outside of the country. Former child soldiers who turned over their weapons were entitled to a 3-month stay in an Interim Care Center (ICC), which offered medical aid, counseling, reading lessons, and help tracing families. Many children refused to leave the ICCs due to concerns for their personal safety and lack of schools or other support in their communities.

“Former rebel combatants continued to forcibly conscript persons, including children, to serve as porters, laborers, and sex slaves; however, unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that government forces or former government militias conducted such conscriptions.”

Nepal

“During the year, Maoists significantly expanded a campaign of abducting civilians, primarily students and teachers, for indoctrination programs and forced paramilitary training. In January and February [2004], approximately 700 children were abducted. Additionally, Maoist-enforced education closures in the western part of the country affected more than 700,000 students and 51,000 employees from 5,000 private and public schools, according to the Western Regional Coordination Committee of the Private and Boarding Schools Organization Nepal.

“Maoists engaged in regular abduction of thousands of school children throughout the country. In June [2004], for example, Maoists abducted more than 7,000 children for indoctrination and for service to the Maoist cadres.

“According to the Government, human rights groups, and the media, Maoists conscripted civilians, including children, into service and have used abducted civilians as human shields during attacks on army and police posts.

“On July 18 [2004], Maoists abducted 50 students and 12 teachers from a school within the Kathmandu Valley for a 3-day military training course. All of the students and teachers were released unharmed on July 20. In early September [2004], the Maoists abducted over 1,000 persons in Syangja and Taplejung Districts for indoctrination, and another 2,000 in Dadeldhura for military training.

“There were numerous credible reports that Maoists recruited teenagers to serve as porters, runners, cooks, and armed cadre. During the 2003 ceasefire, the Maoists reportedly abducted hundreds of rural teens and children, requiring them to attend training and indoctrination programs and join their ranks. In June [2004], Maoists abducted more than 7,000 children for indoctrination or for service to the Maoist cadres.

“There were reports of children held in jail or in custody as suspected Maoists. For example, in July [2004], security forces arrested 14-year-old Lila Pariyar of Sutwal-7 Village in Nawalparasi District on suspicion of being a Maoist. In September [2004], Pariyar was discovered in a district jail, where she had been held for 2 months.”

Paraguay

“Over the past several years, the Government has established review procedures for military conscripts to prevent enlistment of minors and to investigate and report on abuses and conditions. During the year, the Government required all military officers responsible for recruiting to ensure that all conscripts met the legally minimum mandated requirement age of 18 for military service. The armed forces also had a human rights office responsible for helping NGOs [non-governmental organizations] investigate alleged uses of forged documents and illegal recruiting practices. In October, the Government's Inter-Institutional Committee on Human Rights, including judges, attorneys, legislators, and NGO representatives, visited military bases around the country to inspect conscripts' records and did not identify any minor soldiers.”

Peru

“Narcotraffickers and Sendero Luminoso [Shining Path] terrorists held 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 [Aby Sanyaf Group]. 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. An official from the Office of the Presidential Advisor on the Peace Process estimated that children made up as much as 19 percent of the NPA's fighting force. The Council for Welfare of Children, in a July report, estimated that children constituted some 13-18 percent of the 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 criminal activities. There were reports that a significant number of ASG members staffing the groups' camps were teenagers. The AFP said that some Islamic schools in Mindanao served as fronts to indoctrinate children and that the ASG used children as couriers and spies.”

Russia

“According to a 2002 report by the U.N. Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Chechen rebels used children to plant landmines and explosives. In September [2004], at least 338 hostages, about half of them children, were killed after terrorists, some of whom were Chechens, took an estimated 1,200 hostages at a school in North Ossetia.”

Rwanda

“The Government continued to detain ex-combatants who returned to the country as part of the ongoing peace process between Rwanda and the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo]; detainees were placed in an 8-to-12-week- reintegration program at Mutobo, in Ruhengeri Province. The returnees included some children. The children generally served as porters for ALIR (now called the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Rwanda, or FDLR); a few served as combatants for FDLR. Child soldiers were held separately from the adult combatants. The Government opened a demobilization center in January [2004] to process and reintegrate rebel child soldiers returning from the DRC. Authorities frequently allowed detainees at the demobilization camp at Mutobo to receive visitors, and sometimes to go home for visits.

“There were numerous reports, including one prepared by an independent panel of experts for the U.N. [United Nations] Security Council, that former RCD/G [Congolese Rally for Democracy-Goma] agents in the DRC entered refugee camps in Rwanda, with the aid of local Rwandan authorities, to recruit young men, including children, to join their militia in the eastern DRC; however, some parents of refugees who left the camps said they sent their children to the DRC for schooling - not for use as soldiers - and the U.N. report, which relied heavily on statements by humanitarian aid workers, did not refute this claim.

“During the year, there were reports that former RCD/G forces in the DRC recruited, sometimes forcibly, children from refugee camps within Rwanda with the aid of local Rwandan officials. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers reported that armed groups in the DRC continued to use approximately 2,000 Rwandan children as soldiers in Ituri district of the DRC. The Government denied that any such recruitment activities occurred in the country and that Rwandan children were being used as child soldiers in the DRC.

“The Government's program of demobilization and reintegration continued during the year, with a number of child soldiers from the DRC participating in the program. In January [2004], the Government opened a demobilization center dedicated specifically to children. The Government participated in an International Labor Organization (ILO)-International Program for Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) program to prevent the involvement of children in armed conflicts and support the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. There were credible reports that, in some regions, children were recruited to work for the LDF [Local Defense Forces]; however, these were isolated cases.”

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 as of year's end, most had 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).”

Sri Lanka

“The LTTE [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam] routinely invaded the privacy of citizens by maintaining an effective network of informants. The LTTE forcibly recruited over 1,000 children during the year. However, during the year, the LTTE also released 613 children, at least 219 of whom were later re-recruited. There were intermittent reports of children as young as 8 years escaping from LTTE camps. After the March [2004] fighting between LTTE factions, some Tamils in the east were forced to relocate to the north, and some Tamils in the north were forced to relocate to the east. They were allowed to return later in the year.

“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 13 years of age, surrendered to the military or the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, and credible reports indicated that the LTTE stepped up recruiting efforts, especially in the east. During the

year, credible sources reported that there were over 1,000 cases of forcible child recruitment by the LTTE and that more than 5,000 children remained in LTTE custody at year's end. In 2003, the LTTE and UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] reached an agreement on the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers and began work on an action plan to address issues relating to child labor, including underage recruitment. Several sources reported that the action plan was not working because of LTTE obstruction. Senior LTTE officials alleged to foreign officials that child soldiers were volunteers.

“During the year, a UNICEF-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.”

Sudan

“The Government operated camps for vagrant children called reformation camps. Police typically sent homeless children who had committed crimes to these camps, where they were detained for indefinite periods. Health care and schooling at the camps generally were poor, and basic living conditions often were primitive. All of the children in the camps, including non Muslims, must study the Koran, and there was pressure on non Muslims to convert to Islam. Male teenagers (and, in the South, some girls) in the camps often were conscripted into the PDF [Popular Defense Forces]. Conscripts faced significant hardship and abuse in military service, often serving on the frontline. There were reports that abducted, homeless, and displaced children were discouraged from speaking languages other than Arabic or practicing religions other than Islam.

“A large number of children suffered abuse, including abduction, enslavement, and forced conscription. The Government and government-allied militias forcibly conscripted young men and boys into the military forces to fight in the civil war. Unlike in the previous year, there were no reports that the South Sudan Unity Movement conscripted boys.

“Although rebel factions forcibly conscripted citizens, including children, the SPLM/A [Sudan People's Liberation Movement Army] also continued to demobilize child soldiers.

“The ICRC [International Committee of the Red Cross] cooperated with UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] to remove child soldiers from the South.

“During the past 19 years, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) kidnapped more than 20,000 Ugandan children, took them back to the southern part of Sudan, and forced them to become sex slaves, pack animals, or soldiers. Many of them have been killed. The Government permitted the Ugandan army access to the South to pursue the LRA. Although Ugandan military operations significantly reduced LRA numbers, the LRA continued to operate in the South and to hold child abductees.”

Tanzania

“According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, which identified an unspecified NGO [non-governmental organization] as its source, the recruitment of children from the country's refugee camps for use as child soldiers continued during the year. UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] personnel working in the refugee camps designated for Burundians investigated these allegations, but they were unable to confirm the recruitment of any children. During the year, UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] reported that there were no sudden declines in the school attendance rates of refugees, which they said would have given an indication of the recruitment of child soldiers.”

Uganda

“The LRA [Lord's Resistance Army], led by Joseph Kony, committed numerous, serious abuses and atrocities. The LRA increased attacks in the northern and eastern parts of the country during the first half of the year, and rebels routinely killed, maimed, tortured, and abducted civilians, including children. 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 during the year. Between 32,000 and 52,000 children known as "night commuters" traveled from conflict areas or internally displaced persons (IDP) camps each night to urban centers to avoid abduction by the LRA.

“The legal recruitment age for military service was 18 years; however, persons below the age of 18 occasionally enlisted, sometimes with the collusion of local officials. During the year, there were reports that the Government continued to recruit children into the UPDF [Uganda People's Defense Force]. Other children were reported to have been recruited into LDUs [Local Defense Units]. The UPDF denied that it had actively recruited child soldiers, but said some might have been allowed to join through deception or oversight. However, 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.

“During the year, the UPDF collaborated with UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund] to identify and remove 300 to 400 underaged soldiers from the 60,000-soldier UPDF. There were also efforts to identify and remove underaged recruits from LDUs, where underage recruitment reportedly was a more serious problem.

“Approximately 12,000 children have been abducted during the last 2 years, and the LRA continued to abduct children and, at clandestine bases, to force them 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 forces 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 numerous children abducted by the LRA; 15,000 children have returned from LRA captivity since the conflict began. The UPDF's Child Protection Unit continued to provide treatment to returned abductees upon arrival at military facilities. It also escorted ex-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. The Amnesty Commission provided orientation to officials in Sudan to better assist applicants, including former abducted child soldiers, to enter the amnesty program.

“Between 32,000 and 52,000 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 March, the U.N. [United Nations] estimated that nearly 18,800 children commuted nightly into Gulu town, 11,000 in Kitgum, and 11,000 in a Kalongo Hospital in Pader District. 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.”

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