

## Child recruiters promoted to key government posts

The United Nations Security Council should impose sanctions on governments and armed groups for using child soldiers, sexual violence against children, and attacks on schools, and should promote effective prosecution of the commanders responsible, Human Rights Watch said today. The Security Council will hold an open debate on children and armed conflict on Wednesday, April 29, 2009. On April 22, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon identified 56 governments and armed groups from 14 countries that are violating international laws prohibiting the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Sixteen of these parties have been included in each of the lists published by the secretary-general since he began making the names of violators public in 2002.

"The Security Council has said that it will consider sanctions against governments and armed groups that refuse to end their use of child soldiers," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocate at Human Rights Watch. "Instead, it has allowed these crimes against children to continue for years."

Governments that have been listed in seven consecutive reports from the secretary-general to the Security Council include the government forces of Burma, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the armed groups include the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) in Colombia, and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda.

Human Rights Watch highlighted several cases in which military commanders in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sri Lanka who are well-known for their use of child soldiers are now in government or senior military positions.

\* In Congo, Jean-Pierre Biyoyo was recently appointed a colonel in the Congolese army despite being convicted by a military court in March 2006 of recruiting children as soldiers while a leader of the Mudundu 40 militia. He was sentenced to five years in prison, but escaped three months later, in June 2006.

\* Bosco Ntaganda was made a general in the Congolese army in January, despite being wanted on an arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the war crime of enlisting child soldiers and using them in hostilities. In addition to the ICC charges, Ntaganda has been accused of commanding troops that massacred 150 civilians at Kiwanja in North Kivu province in November 2008.

\* In Sri Lanka, Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan (known as Colonel Karuna) became the minister of national integration and reconciliation in April. Prior to April 2004, he was the commander of the LTTE's eastern division and was responsible for recruiting thousands of children into LTTE ranks. He subsequently broke with the LTTE and formed an armed force known as the Karuna Group, which allied with the government and then abducted hundreds of children for use as soldiers under Karuna's command.

"For a state to appoint a known child recruiter to a senior government or military position is simply outrageous," said Becker. "Governments should be prosecuting these individuals for war crimes, not rewarding them."

Human Rights Watch called on the Security Council to impose sanctions, including arms embargoes, travel bans, and asset freezes against individuals and parties that have persistently recruited and used child soldiers in violation of international law. It also called for criminal prosecution of individual child recruiters by national courts or through referral to the ICC, which has jurisdiction to try individuals who have enlisted children under 15 years old or used them in hostilities for war crimes. To date, seven individuals have been issued arrest warrants by the court for such crimes.

Human Rights Watch also called on the Security Council to take stronger action to stop sexual violence against children and attacks affecting education. In Congo alone, tens of thousands of women and girls have been subject to sexual violence since the war began in 1996, with no sign this violence is decreasing. Nearly one-third of those brutalized by rape are children.

According to UNESCO, the number of attacks on schools, teachers, and students increased sixfold between 2003 and 2006. In Afghanistan, roughly 600 schools remained closed as of March following attacks by anti-government forces. In southern Thailand, insurgents have burned down more than 280 schools.

An assessment by Human Rights Watch found that in 2008 the Security Council's

working group on children and armed conflict issued 83 recommendations related to the use of child soldiers, but only 13 related to sexual violence and only three regarding attacks affecting education.

"Children who have been raped or are denied an education because of attacks on schools also deserve strong Security Council action," Becker said.

On April 22, 62 nongovernmental organizations representing parents in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo appealed to the Security Council in a letter to end abuses against children in the conflict. The groups cited continued killings, rape and sexual violence, attacks on schools, and recruitment of child soldiers in the conflict areas of eastern Congo.

"We deplore the guilty silence that has prevailed until now among our leaders and the international community," the groups stated. "All of these crimes, whose perpetrators are often well-known, take place in a context of total impunity."

The organizations called on the Security Council to impose sanctions on perpetrators, develop an action plan for Congo that addresses sexual violence and violence affecting education, and strengthen efforts to demobilize child soldiers and reintegrate them into their communities.

The Security Council has required the UN to negotiate action plans with governments and armed groups to end their use of child soldiers. Human Rights Watch called on the Security Council to expand these action plans to address sexual violence against children and attacks on education. It also called for the Security Council to impose targeted sanctions against perpetrators of these crimes.

To read Human Rights Watch's recommendations to the Security Council on sexual violence and attacks on education, please visit:

<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/04/20/taking-next-step>

Basic information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child\\_soldiers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_soldiers)

**Child Soldiers Global Report 2008:**

<http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/>

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers:

<http://www.child-soldiers.org/home>

Other organizations working on this problems:

<http://www.child-soldiers.org/sub/links/links>