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Children Speak

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A Newsletter of the Organization for the Protection of Children's Rights

Message from the President

We applaud the 58 countries that were represented at the "Free Children from War" high-level conference in Paris on February 6, 2007 for adopting the Paris Commitments which lay out guidelines relating to the protection of children from recruitment with armed groups or forces and their release and successful reintegration into civilian life.

The Paris Commitments and Principles are added to the other 8 key documents that are related to the protection of children in armed conflict. Some of these include the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* and the *Rome Statute* of the International Criminal Court.

Unfortunately, even with these laudable and commendable international instruments and norms, in over 30 situations of concern around the world today, children continue to be brutalized and pitilessly used to further the agenda of adults. It is estimated that over 2 million children have been killed in situations of armed conflicts, another 6 million children have been permanently disabled and more than a quarter of a million children continue to be exploited as child soldiers.¹

As recently as January and February of 2007, the Child Rights Information Network reported that children have featured prominently in recent fighting as active combat-

ants in the conflict in Somalia, Sri Lankan children are being abducted to fight as soldiers in the bloody conflict by separatist Tamil Tiger rebels and the Karuna faction, and that the recruitment of child

soldiers has continued in the Democratic Republic of Congo, despite the government's efforts to integrate former militia into the army.²

Children are used in combat, to lay mines, as guards, scouts, spies, porters, cooks and for sexual purposes. They are vulnerable beings who are forced or enticed to join armed groups. They are abused and witness atrocious acts of violence. Children are intimidated and threatened into obedience and they know that obeying is the only way to ensure their survival. Their physical, emotional and psychological well-being is therefore seriously compromised every minute of every day. Is that the legacy that we want to leave our children? How shameful!

This issue of Children Speak is dedicated to those children who have been killed, disabled, orphaned, exploited and harmed by the acts of those adults who unfortunately, cannot seem to be capable of resolving their conflicts in a peaceful manner. ■

(Footnotes on page 6).



Riccardo Di Done



Historic Commitment

In Paris to Liberate Children from War

By Dan Thomas

PARIS, France, 6 February 2007 – Fifty-eight countries represented at a high-level conference in Paris today committed themselves to stopping the unlawful recruitment and use of children in armed conflicts.

Concluding the two-day 'Free Children from War' conference, French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy and UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah congratulated delegates on taking this historic step to protect boys and girls from getting caught up in adult wars.

"We commit ourselves to spare no effort to end the unlawful recruitment and use of children by armed forces or groups in all regions of the world," Mr. Douste-Blazy told a packed final session. He also expressed deep concern on behalf of all delegates that girls continue to be overlooked in efforts to protect children, and he committed to help redress the imbalance.

'A long road ahead'

The Paris Commitments, as they are now known, lay out detailed guidelines for protecting children from recruitment and for providing assistance to those already involved with armed groups or forces. They will complement the political and legal mechanisms already in place at the UN Security Council, the International Criminal Court and other bodies



Former child soldier Ishmael Beah holds up the Paris Commitments at the end of the historic 'Free Children from War' conference in Paris

trying to protect children from exploitation and violence.

"Fifty-eight countries, 70 inter-governmental organizations and 30 non-governmental organizations – experts and grassroots actors – we are all concerned," said Ms. Salah in her concluding remarks. "Concerned by the shame of seeing children used for war.

Concerned about the future of these children who are too often forgotten – these boys and girls considered by their recruiters to be expendable."

Later Ms. Salah added: "We are very excited to see so much political commitment to tackling this issue. We know it is a long road ahead of us and it will require long-term commitment and support, but we truly hope this marks the beginning of the end for the use of children in warfare."

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- UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Rima Salah

Preventing child recruitment

The conference, which was jointly organized by the French Government and UNICEF, attracted dozens of government ministers, donors, the heads of several UN agencies – including UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman – and many non-governmental organizations. Speakers included Burundian Minister Francoise Ngendahayo; Luxembourg's Deputy Prime Minister, Jean Asselborn; the Manager of

Paris Commitment to Liberate Children from War



the World Bank's Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, Ian Bannon; the President of Terre Des Hommes, Lysiane Andre; and Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo

from the International Criminal Court.

French Children's Petition

At a reception at the French Foreign Ministry on Monday night, children and UNICEF France President Jacques Hintzy presented Mr. Douste-Blazy with a petition that included more than 235,000 signatures collected by children and UNICEF volunteers across France. The petition calls for the liberation of child soldiers and more financial support for disarmament,

News

demobilization and reintegration programmes for children caught in conflict. The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, promised to take some of the signatures back to the United Nations.

"This petition is very symbolic," she said, "because it is not only government that is making a pledge but at the grassroots the people in France feel very strongly about this issue, and they want the government and the international community to take note and take action." ■

"More than an end to war, we want an end to the beginning of all wars – yes, an end to this brutal, inhuman and thoroughly impractical method of settling the differences between governments."

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt

CHILD SOLDIERS



At any one time, more than 300,000 children under 18 girls and boys - are fighting as soldiers with government armed forces and armed opposition groups in more than 30 countries worldwide. In more than 85 countries, hundreds of thousands more under-18s have been recruited into government armed forces, paramilitaries, civil militia and a wide variety of non-state armed groups. Millions of children worldwide receive military training and indoctrination in youth movements and schools. While most child soldiers are aged between 15 and 18, the youngest age recorded is seven.

FACT-FILE

These statistics represent only a snapshot of the problem, as children are recruited, captured, demobilised, wounded or even killed every day. Many of today's adult soldiers started out as children, growing up in military ranks; in many countries, with inadequate systems of birth registration, age can be difficult to determine.

Conflicts come and go as well; the more protracted the armed conflict, the more likely children will participate. In recent years, large numbers of children fighting in Latin America and the Middle East region have been replaced as conflicts recede by new generations of child soldiers in Africa and Asia. In the industrialized world, there is general trend away from conscription and towards volunteer, professional armies; combined with economic and social change this has made enlistment levels more difficult to sustain and placed downward pressures on recruitment age.

While many children fight in the frontline, others are used as spies, messengers, sentries, porters, servants and sexual slaves; children are often used to lay and clear landmines or conditioned to commit atrocities even against their own families and communities. Most child soldiers suffer physical abuse and other privations within the armed forces; in extreme cases, child soldiers are driven to suicide or murder when they cannot bear the mistreatment any longer. When children are used as soldiers, all children in a conflict zone are often suspected and targeted by the warring parties.

While some children are recruited forcibly, others are driven into armed forces by poverty, alienation and discrimination. Many children join armed groups after having experienced

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Small Arms & Light Weapons Challenges in Sri Lanka & Options for the Future

By Yolanda Foster, Hashitha Abeywardana

In South Asia, large numbers of civilians die from small arms violence. Sri Lanka is heavily affected by the proliferation of illicit small arms that impacts on community safety and security, undermines development and is an obstacle to peace in the country.

The proliferation of small arms in Sri Lanka is reaching crisis proportions. The flow of arms into Sri Lanka is closely linked to the long-running conflict between the Sri Lankan state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). However, the use of small arms is not simply confined to the conflict. There is a thriving market for illicit small arms in relation to armed crime characterized by a violent political culture.

The knowledge of the flow, use and impact of small arms in Sri Lanka is limited. In order to understand the experience of how small arms have affected local communities in different areas of the country, the South Asia Small Arms Network (SASA Net) Sri Lanka, supported by Saferworld, organized a civil society consultation process in 23 districts between November 2004 and March 2005. Civil society organizations have played a leading role in efforts to address the problems of small arms in Sri Lanka. The civil society consultation was designed to assess public perceptions of illicit small arms and to understand the different ways in which small arms impact on public and community perceptions of security in Sri Lanka. Conducted in the form of focus groups, the process involved over 600 community representatives who came together in a consultation involving 23 district meetings and 9 provincial meetings. This culminated in a National Forum where the findings were shared with government representatives, members of the National Commission Against the Proliferation of Illicit Small Arms (NCAPISA) and civil society and helped contribute to the development of a national strategy to address small arms problems in Sri Lanka.

The Report provides a summary of key recommendations that were presented at the National Forum at the end of the consultation process, to the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL).

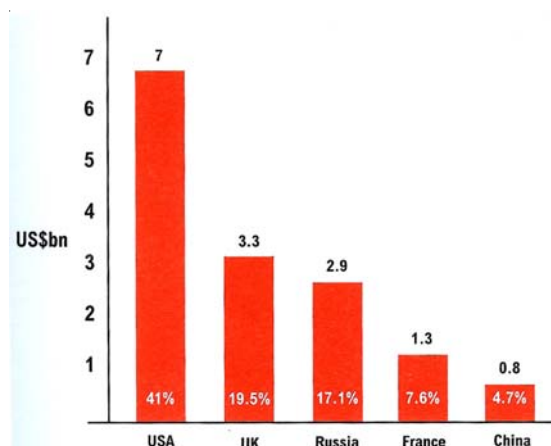


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Review

The GoSL and a range of civil society groups have shown an interest in taking progressive steps to combat the challenge of illicit small arms. The community consultations that took place in 2004 and 2005 have been a key part of this, culminating in the National Forum and establishment of the Civil Society Action Committee. At the international level, the GoSL has played an important role in discussions to develop the Plan of Action (PoA) further as a part of the 2003 and 2005 UN Biennial Meeting of States. Sri Lanka has made important progress to tackle small arms at the national and international level. The civil society consultations have been a key part of this process.

The Report can be downloaded in English, Sinhala and Tamil from www.saferworld.org.uk/publications. ■



In 2002, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council accounted for 90% of the arms deliveries to the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America (www.controlarms.org)

Fostering Child Rights

Seminar on Dissemination & Action

23-24 February 2007

The K. J. Somaiya comprehensive college of Education, Training and Research, Vidyavihar, Mumbai, conducted a seminar on *Towards Fostering Child Rights: Seminar on Dissemination and Action*, as part of the Senior Scholars' Seminar Series under the Sesqui Centennial Celebrations of the University of Mumbai on 23rd & 24th February 2007.

The seminar had 4 sub themes namely – child rights at home, child rights in school, rights and provisions for children with special needs and action plan for fostering child rights through teaching, research and extension.

The seminar was inaugurated by Dr. A. D. Sawant, Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of Mumbai, along with Shri. Samirbhai S. Somaiya – Trustee, Somaiya Vidyavihar, Dr. Gahver Kapadia, Consultant, Child Resource Centre, CHETNA and Dr. Padmini T, Emeritus Professor in Education, University of Mysore.

Dr. A. D. Sawant, in his address, narrated some heart rendering stories of street children and spoke at length about their plight. He stressed that since children's needs are not met and



Inaugural Session: (From Left to Right): Dr. Vasundhara Padmanabhan, Principal, K. J. Somaiya Comprehensive College of Education, Training and Research, Dr. A. D. Sawant – Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Mumbai, Shri. Samir S. Somaiya –Trustee, Somaiya Vidyavihar, Dr. Gahver Kapadia, Consultant, Child Resource Center, CHETNA, Dr. Padmini T. – Emeritus Prof. Dept. of Education, University of Mysore, Trustee, Pratham, Mysore

because their curiosities are not answered, their mental growth can be arrested. He expressed a lot of hope from the outcomes of the seminar and stressed that we need to adopt children and look after their education. Shri. Samir S. Somaiya in his speech recounted his personal experiences in dealing with children. He talked of initiating the idea of profit making companies to share their profits for the cause of education.

'Each one teach one & each one help five' was his message to the gathering.

Events

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Gahver Kapadia.

She talked of child rights scenario and highlighted alarming statistics regarding male female ratio, of malnourished children, dropouts, sexually abused children etc. She pointed out the most basic needs of child and rationalized as to why children must have rights. She stressed the need for all stakeholders to complement each others' efforts and see that the goal of rights for every child is achieved. ■

Children Gather in Lyon

To Call for Sustainable Development

The UNICEF BioVision World Life Sciences Forum held in Lyon from 7 to 14 March 2007, focused on the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals – time bound goals for human development, as its theme this year. The BioVision World Life Sciences Forum is a biennial event that brings together prominent scientists, including Nobel laureates and other leaders to address vital life science issues facing our world today.

The UNICEF-BioVision Children's Forum that precedes BioVision 2007 will give children and

young people a platform for their views to be heard by policy makers, members of governments, decision-makers, researchers, the private sector, scientists and professionals, civil society, NGOs and media, to foster open debate. UNICEF is supporting the participation of children who are already achieving results in their own countries. Each one has a remarkable story, such as the boy from China who won the Stockholm Junior Water prize or the girl from Kenya who is a leading advocate

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FIRST ANNIVERSARY PROJECT KIRAN

By Maitri Porecha

March 19th 2007 marked the first anniversary of "Project Kiran". On 19 March 2006, the project came into existence with the name "Kiran" meaning a ray of hope. Weekly program since then have almost been carried out uninterruptedly to date. Several Volunteers responsible to initiate the project have moved on after graduation. A new batch of enthusiastic volunteers are now conducting the program with assistance from their peers and under the able guidance of Prof. Samuel Mathew – the inspiring force



Art teacher, Ms. Kunda provides her voluntary service every week by conducting drawing classes for the children of Project Kiran

behind the National Social Service Scheme (N.S.S.) Unit of Kirti college.

The Project has made steady progress by collaborating with other NGOs for training, funds and rehabilitation of the children. These organizations include: The Times Foundation, The Vatsalya Trust, The KEM Hospital Drug Rehabilitation Unit, Pratham, an organization focused on providing primary education to destitute children and Rotract Club. The project was selected as the best project among all NSS unit projects in Mumbai this year. ■

Updates

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CHILDREN GATHER IN LYON

for the elimination of female genital cutting. The highlight of the program was the presentation of the children's Call to Action to the plenary session of BioVision 2007 on 14 March.

Participants included: Ten children from Burkina Faso, China, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Laos, Malawi, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Philippines, Tajikistan;

young scientists from 30 countries including China, Egypt, Jordan, South Africa; Nobel Laureates Prof. Werner Arber, (Medicine) Prof. Peter Doherty (Medicine), and United Nations officials such as Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General; Kul C. Gautam, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director; (Peace, 1965) and Jeffrey Sachs, Director, Earth Institute at Columbia University. ■

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CHILD SOLDIERS

or witnessed abuse at the hands of state authorities. The widespread availability of modern lightweight weapons has also contributed to the child soldiers' problem, enabling even the smallest children to become efficient killers in combat. International political and military support for armed forces and armed groups using children, sometimes linked to the exploitation of natural resources like diamonds or oil, has in many cases deepened conflicts and the involvement of children.

Many governments and armed groups claim to use children because of a shortage of adult recruits. But often children are recruited because of their very qualities as children they can be cheap, expendable and easier to condition into fearless killing and unthinking obedience. Sometimes, children are supplied with drugs and alcohol to achieve these aims.

Often child soldiers are recruited from second countries, among refugee communities or ethnic

diasporas, and trafficked across borders. Children from Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda have fought alongside their adult sponsors in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Children have been recruited from various countries of Western Europe by Kurdish and Kosovar armed groups.

In many countries, military training and indoctrination is provided through schools and youth movements, often as a means of bolstering defense preparedness or recruitment levels. In Iraq, thousands of children aged 10 to 15 participate in the Ashbal Saddam (Saddam Lion Cubs) youth movement formed after the 1991 Gulf War; training reportedly include small-arms use, hand-to-hand combat, and infantry tactics. In the United States of America, military-run programs exist for children as young as eight. In the Young Marines, boys and girls from age 8-18 wear uniforms, are assigned military ranks, and participate in boot camp and rifle drills; the program has over 200 units nation-wide, with 14,865 participants in early 2001. ■



worldrevolution.org

President's Message Footnotes: 1. Children and Armed Conflict: <http://www.un.org/children/conflict/english/conflicts2.html>; 2. CRINMAIL: http://www.crin.org/email/crinmail_detail.asp?crinmailID=1875, http://www.crin.org/email/inmail_detail.asp?crinmailID=1878, <http://www.irin.news.org/Report.aspx?ReportID=70251>