Child Recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal

Jo Becker
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This working paper is a product of the Ford Institute's working group, "Child Soldiers Initative: Building Knowledge about Children and Armed Conflict". The Child Soldiers Initiative is an ongoing network of scholars, policymakers and representatives of civil society engaged in promoting and developing policy proposals addressing the recruitment and reintegration of child soldiers.

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Introduction

The number of child soldiers in Asia is second only to Africa. Although precise figures are impossible to establish, the number of child soldiers in the region is likely to exceed 75,000. Child soldiers have participated in several of the region's ongoing armed conflicts, including those in Afghanistan, Burma, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, and the recently-ended conflict in Nepal.

As in other regions, myriad factors contribute to the recruitment and participation of children in Asia's armed conflicts. These include poverty, displacement, and a lack of schooling or work opportunities, separation from family or an abusive family environment, among others. In most situations of child recruitment, multiple factors are at play, and often overlap.

While all of these factors contribute to child recruitment in Asia, three recruitment mechanisms are particularly dominant: forced recruitment; indoctrination; and the role of government abuses in fueling recruitment by armed opposition groups. Specifically, this paper examines these mechanisms in relation to child recruitment by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers), the Karuna group in Sri Lanka, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) in Nepal, and the Tatmadaw (national army) and armed ethnic opposition forces in Burma (Myanmar).

Forced recruitment, indoctrination, and government abuses fuel child recruitment in many of the world's armed conflicts. For example, Gutierrez Sanin finds in his examination of child recruitment in Colombia that over 40 percent of former child soldiers identified at least one of these factors as a key reason for joining the guerilla.[1] However, in several respects, the

characteristics of these child recruitment patterns differ notably in Asia compared to other parts of the globe.

Forced recruitment of children in Burma, Nepal and Sri Lanka is particular to the region in at least two respects. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, forced recruitment by armed opposition groups has often been characterized by quota systems, rarely seen in other conflicts, where families are forced to supply one member for the "cause." Secondly, forced recruitment in most conflicts is generally practiced by armed opposition groups therefore the widespread and systematic forced recruitment by government forces in Burma is somewhat anomalous.

Indoctrination during the recruitment process may play a stronger role in many Asian conflicts because of the political sophistication and clear political agenda that characterize many of the opposition forces found in Asia. As a consequence, child recruitment by these groups often is marked by a strong element of political indoctrination, as armed groups endeavor to convince children that it is their duty to join the armed struggle. Political indoctrination has been practiced by armed opposition groups in all three countries, and particularly by the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and the Maoists in Nepal. One form of indoctrination widely practiced by the Maoists prior to the 2006 ceasefire – short-term abduction for indoctrination sessions – is not utilized by any other known armed group.

Human rights abuses by government forces are a third factor that significantly fuels recruitment by opposition forces in all three conflicts. Attacks against civilians, arbitrary detention, displacement, extrajudicial executions, sexual violence, and other abuses against members of family or community members are cited by child soldiers in all three conflicts as a reason for joining armed opposition groups.

Methodology

This paper relies principally on interviews conducted during Human Rights Watch field investigations between 2002 and 2006. In each of the three countries, between 20 and 35 former child soldiers provided in-depth accounts of their recruitment, training, and participation in armed groups and forces.[2]

The former child soldiers were identified for interview by several methods. Many were known to local non-governmental organizations, including both human rights and humanitarian groups working with war-affected populations. The majority of former child soldiers interviewed in Sri Lanka, and some of those interviewed in Nepal, were participating in rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers or children affected by armed conflict. Many of the former Burma government soldiers interviewed along the Thai-Burma border were identified by armed ethnic opposition groups; many of these former child soldiers had surrendered to the groups after deserting government forces. In Nepal, a significant number of former child soldiers were interviewed while in government detention following their capture from Maoist forces.

The former child soldiers were between the ages of eleven and seventeen at the time of their recruitment. Their length of service with armed groups or forces ranged from several weeks to ten years. The former child soldiers interviewed in Sri Lanka were primarily girls;[3] in Nepal they included both boys and girls; and in Burma, were exclusively boys.[4]

Background: The Extent of Child Recruitment in Sri Lanka, Burma and Nepal

The conflicts in Sri Lanka, Burma and Nepal have each been marked significantly by the recruitment and participation of children.

In Sri Lanka, the LTTE have used children as combatants and in other roles throughout most of the twenty-year conflict.[5] Children were initially recruited into a "baby brigade," but later integrated into other units. Assessments of LTTE soldiers killed in combat in the 1990's found that between 40 and 60 percent of the dead fighters were children under the age of eighteen.[6] The total number of children recruited by the LTTE is unknown, but an extensive monitoring system established by UNICEF just prior to the 2002 ceasefire agreement documented 6,098 cases of child recruitment by the LTTE between January 2002 and the end of March 2007.[7]

In 2006, reports emerged of child recruitment by forces led by V. Muralitharan, a former LTTE commander known as Karuna. Karuna had between 4,000- 6,000 forces under his command, including some 2,000 child soldiers, when he broke off from the LTTE in March 2004.[8] The LTTE attacked and defeated his forces, which quickly disbanded. In 2005, however, Karuna began to rebuild his forces and fight against the LTTE. By the end of March 2007, UNICEF had received 285 reports of child recruitment by Karuna forces, but estimated the actual total may have been three times higher.[9] In numerous cases, the Sri Lankan government, including local security forces, had knowledge of child abductions from government-held territory, yet failed to intervene or secure the release of the children.[10]

In Burma, children have been recruited by both national armed forces, as well as the myriad ethnic opposition groups.[11] During the 1990's, the number of children in government armed forces increased significantly as the government doubled the size of its military and recruiters increasingly targeted children for forced recruitment to compensate for a lack of adult volunteers. Former child soldiers from government forces interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2002 reported that up to 20 percent of those in their units were children under the age of

eighteen, and that 35 to 45 percent of new recruits may have been children.[12] Given the size of Burma's military—an estimated 350,000 troops—these accounts suggest that tens of thousands of children are serving in the national army.

Many of Burma's ethnic armed opposition groups similarly include children. In 2002, Human Rights Watch estimated that nineteen of the armed resistance and insurgent groups had a combined total of 6,000-7,000 child soldiers, making up 10 to 20 percent of opposition forces. The overall numbers of child soldiers in opposition forces declined considerably during the 1990's as most of these groups lost military strength and many reached ceasefire agreements with the government. At the time of our research, we estimated that approximately 10 percent of Burma's child soldiers were found in opposition forces, while government recruitment accounted for the vast majority of the country's child soldiers. Later research conducted in 2004 and 2005 concluded that rates of child recruitment by government forces had not changed significantly.[13]

During Nepal's eleven-year civil war, which ended in 2006, Maoist forces recruited children into their ranks and also abducted large numbers of children for brief periods of indoctrination. Most children recruited by the Maoists served in support roles as porters, cooks, guards, spies, and to assist with political mobilization, but some were given military training and used as combatants. According to one estimate, the Maoists recruited 2,000 to 4,000 children between 1996 and 2004.[14] In 2003, the Asian Human Rights Commission estimated that about thirty percent of Maoist forces were children between ages fourteen and eighteen.[15] In 2006, government security analysts estimated that children made up 30-40 percent of Maoist forces, and believed that the total number of Maoist forces was 10-12,000.[16] Children's rights organizations estimate that to date, over 30,000 children and teachers have been "abducted" by

Maoists forces. While the vast majority released after brief periods of indoctrination, some children are retained as soldiers.[17]

Forced recruitment

Forced recruitment has been commonly practiced in all three conflict situations, particularly by the LTTE and Karuna group in Sri Lanka, the Maoists in Nepal, and the Burma army. Both the Maoists and the LTTE have conducted campaigns claiming that every family is obligated to provide a son or daughter for "the cause." The LTTE typically targets boys and girls between ages fourteen and fifteen, but have taken children as young as eleven. LTTE cadres routinely visit Tamil homes, particularly in the east of Sri Lanka, seeking a member of the family to join the struggle. Families that resist are harassed and threatened. Parents are told that their child may be taken by force if they do not comply, that other children in the household or the parents will be taken instead, or that the family will be forced to leave the home. If after several visits, the family still refuses to provide a child, LTTE cadres may come to the home in the middle of the night and take a child by force, or abduct a child on his or her way home from school. Some children initially reported to Human Rights Watch that they "volunteered" to join the LTTE, but when probed further, it became clear that they were persuaded the family had a duty to provide one member, and believed that if they did not step forward, one of their siblings would be taken instead.[18]

LTTE recruiters also target children attending Hindu temple festivals for forced recruitment. Temple festivals are typically attended by large numbers of Tamils, and adolescents often congregate together during the events. These children are easily targeted by recruiters, who may force groups of children into vans and take them to LTTE camps.[19]

Some accounts suggest that during the ceasefire period between 2002 and 2006, as government abuses in Sri Lanka abated significantly, the LTTE found it much more difficult to find volunteers and increasingly resorted to forced recruitment. Without an active armed conflict, and without active assaults on their communities by government forces, many children and their families did not see a need to join the Tigers. Of the thirty-five former child soldiers interviewed by Human Rights Watch in 2004 (two and a half years into the ceasefire), fewer than half a dozen said they had joined of their own accord. The remainder was recruited by force or coercion.[20]

As hostilities between the government and the LTTE escalated in late 2005, some parents informed international NGOs that the LTTE had threatened them that unless they provided a child for LTTE forces, the LTTE would not provide them with security when war broke out.[21]

In 2006, the Karuna group also began forcibly recruiting children to fight against the LTTE.[22] Typically, a group of at least six men, usually armed with assault rifles, would arrive in a village, and take children and young men from their homes, work places, temples, playgrounds, public roads, and even weddings. The armed men often knew who they were looking for, suggesting they had intelligence about the local population.[23]

Children interviewed by Human Rights Watch in Nepal in early 2006 described a “one family one person” campaign in Western districts of the country. Maoists visited villages and homes, saying that one person from each household had to join. Although the campaign was not specifically targeted at children, in many cases, children joined because there was no available adult.[24] For example, one seventeen-year old girl reported that she had to join because her father was working in India, and her mother had to stay at home to care for her five-year old sister. She

indicated that from her district, the Maoists took about 100 people during their campaign, and that most of them were between fifteen and nineteen years old.[25]

In another case in Nepal, a girl reported that the Maoists first took her fourteen-year-old younger brother. He escaped and after reaching home, refused to return to the Maoists, saying that he would rather be beaten. The girl recalled, "so we had to decide between us in the family whom to send – otherwise the Maoists would have locked our house. I had to go."[26]

In Burma, forced recruitment is practiced primarily by the Tatmadaw, the national army, despite national laws prohibiting the practice. Following a violent 1988 government crackdown against pro-democracy demonstrators in Burma, the government began a rapid expansion of its armed forces, doubling the size of its army in large part to control the civilian population. Child recruitment increased, not only because recruiters were under increasing pressure to bring in new soldiers, but also because adults—increasingly alienated from the government—were less willing to volunteer. In his chapter on factors behind the use of child soldiers, Singer also discusses the recruitment of children by unpopular regimes, citing a similar example of Sudan, which began recruiting child soldiers after its conscription campaign of adult men failed to yield sufficient troops.

While armed groups in Nepal or Sri Lanka frequently approach children in their homes and through their families, recruiters for Burma's army most often target unaccompanied boys in public places, such as bus, train and ferry stations, marketplaces, the streets, and festivals. They typically approach boys between the ages of twelve and seventeen, and use threats and intimidation to coerce the child into joining the military. The most common technique is to ask a boy for an identity card. Because few boys have official identification cards, they often are unable to produce one. The recruiter may then use the lack of identification as a pretext to

threaten the boy with either a long prison term or enlistment in the army. Boys who try to resist may be subjected to beatings and/or detention until they agree to enlist.[27]

Once recruited, the boys are usually taken to a recruitment holding center where they are registered and kept until they are sent to training camps. In numerous accounts given to Human Rights Watch, boys are asked their age during the registration process, but when they truthfully give an age younger than eighteen, are told, "No, you must say eighteen." Registration officials thus collude with recruiters in facilitating the recruitment of under-age soldiers.[28]

In Burma, recruiter incentives play a significant role in fueling the forced recruitment of children. Recruiters are often given bags of rice or cash in exchange for new recruits. The payout varies by battalion and region, but usually includes between 1,000 and 10,000 kyat (equivalent to one week to three months' income for an average person) and fifteen to fifty kilograms of rice per recruit. Age documentation is routinely ignored or forged, and underage recruitment almost never prosecuted. As a result, recruiters often prey upon children to meet their quotas, since children are less able than adults to withstand intimidation and threats, and less likely to be able to pay the bribes that may win their release.[29]

Forced recruitment appears to be the primary method by which Burma's army recruits children. Of twenty former child soldiers with the government army interviewed by Human Rights Watch, all but two had been forcibly recruited. One was forcibly recruited at age fourteen and deserted several years later, but then rejoined because he was afraid he would be caught in his village. The other, a fourteen-year-old boy, initially joined as a "volunteer," but only five days later, changed his mind and tried to escape.[30]

In their chapter, Andvig and Gates note that armed forces that recruit through coercion must also induce compliance among their unwilling soldiers, often through the threat of violent

punishment. This is well-illustrated in Burma, where trainees caught trying to escape are typically forced face-down on the ground, and then beaten by each of the 250 members of their training group. In some instances, children reportedly have died after such punishment.[31]

With the exception of the United Wa State Army, few of Burma's armed ethnic opposition groups rely on forced recruitment, even though some recruited forcibly in the past. Most groups have significantly declined in numbers in recent years, as the groups have either reached ceasefire agreements with the government, or have appreciably decreased the size of their forces. In recent years, most of these groups have maintained force strength primarily through volunteers.

Indoctrination

Both the Maoists in Nepal and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka rely heavily on indoctrination as part of their recruitment strategy. Both groups routinely target children with messages glorifying their cause and participation in their ranks, and utilize schools as a prime recruitment ground. In their chapter on education in refugee camps, McClure and Retamal acknowledge the potential of schools for both propaganda purposes, as well as protective spaces.

In Nepal, primarily in poor, rural areas, the Maoists conduct cultural programs in schools and villages to entice schoolchildren to join. These programs generally consist of singing, dancing, and speeches. Children are told that the Maoists are fighting for the people, fighting against government corruption, and that they must support the cause.[32] Often those presenting the programs are children who are similar in age to those they are trying to enlist. In some areas, these programs are presented somewhat infrequently, for example, once a month. But in others, the programs may take place nearly every day and last for several hours. One 16-year old boy

told Human Rights Watch that the Maoists began visiting his class regularly when he was in grade 6. By grade 9, the vast majority of his classmates had joined. He decided to join too, and said, "I was impressed by their speeches and very influenced by what they said about fighting for the people and fighting corruption."[33]

Among forces using child soldiers, the Maoists seem to be unique in abducting children solely for the purpose of indoctrination. Children are often taken from their schools to another site where they may be forced to witness cultural programs like those already described. These sessions may last a couple of days, a couple of weeks, or even longer. At their conclusion, most abductees are allowed to return home. Presumably their indoctrination experience will make them more likely to join the Maoists later or support the Maoists through donations or other means. However, after their initial abduction, it is not unusual for some children to choose or be forced to remain and become members of the Maoists. The Maoists often use deception as a way of retaining children, telling them that they are to participate in a mobilization campaign for a month or two, but in reality, forcing them to stay indefinitely.[34]

In Sri Lanka, the LTTE employs systematic propaganda campaigns in schools to gain recruits. LTTE cadres often visit schools to speak about the LTTE's struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam, or show films that portray LTTE service in a positive light and highlight LTTE "heroes." In some areas, the LTTE has provided area teachers and principals with "exams" on the history of the LTTE to give to their students. UN officials familiar with these "history lessons" called them "propaganda campaigns."[35]

Outside of the schools, the LTTE regularly expose Tamil children to special events honoring LTTE heroes, parades of LTTE cadres, public displays of war paraphernalia, and speeches and videos. Families of LTTE heroes are afforded special respect. Children are

repeatedly told of discrimination and abuses the Tamil people have experienced, and told that the LTTE is fighting on their behalf for a separate state. One boy, who left school at age fifteen to join the LTTE said that he did so because he "wanted a separate Eelam."[36]

Similar to the cultural programs put on by the Maoists in Nepal, the LTTE also use street dramas as a way to recruit children (and to win the support of their parents). One person described a drama they had witnessed that depicted a father, mother and two children. One child is shot and killed by government security forces. The remaining child, who is still in school, then decides to join the LTTE. In the drama, the mother resists and begs the child not to join, but the father ultimately convinces the mother that the correct thing to do is to give their remaining child to the LTTE.[37] Although such dramas are performed for people of all ages, children are a key target audience.

As noted by Wessells in this volume, the use of girls by armed groups is prevalent in many armed conflicts. Both the Maoists in Nepal and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka recruit significant numbers of girls. In Sri Lanka, 40 percent of the children recruited into the LTTE are girls; one of the highest percentages of girl soldiers of any country in the world.[38] In some Maoists strongholds in Nepal, one-third of Maoists are reportedly female.[39] Both the Maoists and the LTTE portray the recruitment of girls as a reflection of the group's commitment to gender equality. For example, the LTTE claims that the recruitment of girls and women is a way of "assisting women's liberation and counteracting the oppressive traditionalism of the present system."[40]

The Maoists also portray participation in their struggle as a positive alternative to the gender inequality experienced by many women and girls, including limited opportunities for education, arranged marriages, lack of property rights, etc. For example, one seventeen-year-old

girl said that the Maoists initially convinced her to join their campaign by explaining that as a woman she would never be able to achieve anything, even if she continued her studies. She said, "I had finished sixth grade by then. They were saying that young girls like me should join them because in Nepal there was no point in studying, since in any case I would not be able to get a job."[41]

In their chapter, Andvig and Gates discuss the role of ideological incentives in the recruitment process, but note that ideology alone is often insufficient to develop a strong enough bond with the armed group to avoid high rates of desertion. They argue that force is often used in addition to non-pecuniary benefits (linked to ideology, religion or ethnicity), and economic incentives. This bears out in the cases of the Maoists and the LTTE, which both use indoctrination in combination with force to recruit and maintain children in their forces.

Indoctrination plays little role in child recruitment practices in Burma. The government makes little if any effort to persuade children to join the army of their own accord, relying instead on forced recruitment. Most children who were forced into the army did not want to join, having heard stories from others about the difficulty of life in the army. Most of the former government child soldiers interviewed by Human Rights Watch had no idea of why they were fighting. Some reported that their commanders tried to motivate them with propaganda about the ethnic opposition groups, for example, describing abuses (often fictitious) by these groups against Burmese monks or the elderly. However, most said they received little or no information from their superiors about the army's objectives or the nature of their "enemy."[42]

At least in recent years, most ethnic opposition groups in Burma have not used indoctrination to any significant degree, as the severity of government abuses (discussed below) fuels the groups' limited need for new recruits.

Government abuses

In nearly all conflicts where children participate, human rights abuses by government forces play a role in encouraging children to join opposition forces. In her chapter on displacement and child recruitment, Lischer discusses the impact of witnessing atrocities against family members or peers in the decision to join an armed group. Children may be seeking revenge for abuses committed against members of their family, or may believe that their participation in the struggle is needed in order to protect their community. In this respect, recruitment patterns in Asia are similar to those in other parts of the world.

Prior to the 2002 ceasefire, children in Sri Lanka routinely experienced or witnessed government abuses against Tamils. Abuses by government forces included unlawful detention, torture, execution, enforced disappearances, and rape. A 1993 study of adolescents in Vaddukoddai in the North found that one quarter of the children studied had witnessed violence personally.[43] In response, many children joined the LTTE, seeking to protect their families or to avenge real or perceived abuses.

One boy told Human Rights Watch that he joined the LTTE when he was sixteen. He explained that the army burnt his house and raped women in his neighborhood. “They tortured us,” he said. It became clear during the interview that the events that he described took place years before, when he was only three years old. Although he may not have remembered the events directly or understood their meaning at the time, they became an important part of his family’s narrative and heavily influenced his decision to join the LTTE years later.[44]

Another girl recounted how the Sri Lankan army had killed her father and four of her uncles as suspected LTTE cadres when she was eight years old. She described being very angry at government forces and when she was sixteen, decided to join the LTTE.[45]

In Burma, government abuses also play a significant role in the participation of children in the myriad ethnic opposition groups that have long fought the government. The military regime has been responsible for displacing hundreds of thousands of people from the ethnic minority areas, burning villages, using children and adults for forced labor, and retaliating against civilians in areas where opposition groups are active. Children interviewed often identified such abuses as an impetus for them to join opposition groups. For example, one boy who joined the Karenni Army at age fifteen said, "I decided to fight the Burmese soldiers because they'd burned and destroyed our village. I hate the Burmese soldiers."[46] Another boy said that he joined the Karen National Liberation Army because the army had killed his mother when he was six years old.[47]

In Nepal, government abuses against civilians were common during the country's ten-year civil war. Over 13,000 people were killed, the majority civilian. Over 1,700 people disappeared; and in 2003 and 2004, Nepal recorded the highest number of new cases of disappearances in the world.[48] The vast majority of these disappearances—approximately 1,300—have been attributed to the government. The government is also known to have carried out torture and killings of suspected Maoists, rape of women and girls, and arbitrary arrests and detention.[49]

Although Human Rights Watch interviews suggested that forced recruitment and indoctrination played a more significant role in child recruitment by Maoist forces, government abuses also influenced some children to join. For example, one seventeen-year old girl was taken

by the Maoists for a two-week indoctrination session. When she returned home, she discovered that the army had killed two people from her area who had participated in the Maoists' mobilization. She said that incident influenced her to stay with the Maoists.[50]

Another girl reported that she began experiencing harassment by members of the government army when she was nine years old. The army sought information about her older brother, a member of the Maoists, and suspected her of being a Maoist informer. She said that the army repeatedly came to question her at her home and school. Twice, they detained her in army barracks for torture and questioning, once for five days, and once for a week. During these periods of detention, she said that she was blindfolded, beaten twice a day, and given little food. She said that this mistreatment by the army influenced her increasing involvement with the Maoists as a member of a cultural troupe. She participated as a singer and dancer in Maoist cultural programs over a two-year period, but also learned to use a range of weapons, including magnums, rifles, grenades, socket bombs, and pressure cooker bombs, and performed some military support duties.[51]

Policy Directions

Forced recruitment, indoctrination, and government abuses are all significant factors underlying children's participation in Nepal's, Sri Lanka's and Burma's armed conflicts. In all three countries, forced recruitment is a dominant strategy used to recruit children, with the exception of most ethnic opposition groups in Burma. Indoctrination plays a significant, though lesser, role in Nepal and Sri Lanka, but is nearly absent in the Burmese context. Human rights abuses by government forces also influence the participation of children in all three countries' opposition groups, particularly in Burma and in Sri Lanka prior to 2002.

The relative strength of each factor not only varies between countries, but also within individual countries based on the ebb and flow of the conflict itself. For example, in Sri Lanka, the influence of indoctrination and government abuses was dominant prior to the 2002 ceasefire, but with the cessation of hostilities in 2002, forced recruitment became much more prevalent. As hostilities escalate in 2007, recruitment through indoctrination and as a result of government abuses may again become more common.

The recruitment factors explored here, including their particular manifestations in these conflict situations, suggest a number of policy directions and prevention strategies.

Reducing forced recruitment

Incidents of forced recruitment can be reduced by removing any financial or professional incentives that recruiters may enjoy for securing children as new recruits, and employing effective sanctions against recruiters found to be recruiting children in violation of national laws or the stated policies of armed groups. Both government and non-governmental armed forces should be encouraged to adopt clear policies and codes of conduct governing recruitment practices that comply with international law, and incorporate appropriate safeguards against under-age recruitment, including verification of age and clear sanctions, and including criminal prosecution for recruiters that violate minimum age standards. The inclusion of such codes, as well as implementation and verification mechanisms, should be part of any action plans to end child recruitment that are developed in cooperation with the United Nations. (See Chikuhwa's chapter regarding the UN protection agenda and measures, including action plans, requested by the UN Security Council.) In addition, any military training for government or non-governmental

armed groups, whether conducted by the UN or by individual countries that provide training for foreign troops, should actively promote such codes and practices.

Mitigating the impact of indoctrination

Indoctrination, for the purposes of child recruitment, can be mitigated by restricting the access of armed groups and forces to schools, as sites for propaganda campaigns, and by conducting counter-campaigns to educate children and their families regarding the realities of military service. UN agencies such as UNICEF, international non-governmental organizations, and donor governments can all play an active role in working with local community groups (including parents, religious leaders, educators, local elders and others) to develop and support public education campaigns and identify measures that are appropriate to the local context to limit recruiter access to schools. McClure and Retamal's chapter on education in refugee camps outlines a number of programmatic interventions and strategies to develop a schools' potential to protect children from recruitment.

Reducing government abuses as a motivating factor

Child recruitment by opposition armies can be decreased if government forces scrupulously adhere to international humanitarian law and avoid human rights abuses against civilian populations that may engender a desire for revenge among children. Governments should ensure that soldiers in their armed forces are trained in international humanitarian and human rights standards. This can be done through developing or strengthening their own training programs, or utilizing training from the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations, or third-party governments. As outlined above in regards to forced recruitment, clear penalties should be established, clearly communicated throughout the chain of command, and

most importantly, applied to any soldier found to commit human rights violations. The application of sanctions against violators is essential to fostering good discipline and eliminating the culture of impunity that prevails in many armed forces.

Notes

[1] 20 percent identified forced recruitment, 12 percent identified "conviction," and 10 percent identified fear or vengeance related to the army or paramilitaries.

[2] Interviews were conducted near the Thai-Burma border from March-June 2002, in the east and north of Sri Lanka in August of 2004, and in Nepal in March and May 2006. Interviews with family members of children abducted by the Karuna Group in Sri Lanka were conducted in eastern Sri Lanka in October 2006.

[3] The largest number of children interviewed by the research team was participating in a rehabilitation program run exclusively for girls, resulting in a disproportionate number of girls interviewed for the investigation.

[4] No girls are known to serve in Burma's national army, and the participation of girls in Burma's armed ethnic opposition groups is very rare.

[5] See Human Rights Watch, *Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004).

[6] Rohan Gunaratna, "LTTE Child Combatants," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, July 1998.

[7] Data supplied to Human Rights Watch by UNICEF Sri Lanka, April 9, 2007. This number represents only a fraction of the total number of children recruited, as some families may be unaware of the possibility of registering their children once recruited, may be afraid to do so, or may have difficulty reaching a UNICEF office. Of the children who have been released or returned from the LTTE, only 37 percent were previously listed in the UNICEF database.

[8] Human Rights Watch, *Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004) and Human Rights Watch, *Complicit in Crime: State Collusion in Abduction and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007). After the March 2004 split, UNICEF recorded the return of approximately 1,800 children from Karuna forces to their homes.

[9] Data supplied to Human Rights Watch by UNICEF, April 9, 2007.

[10] Human Rights Watch, *Complicit in Crime: State Collusion in Abduction and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007).

[11] See Human Rights Watch, *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

[12] For more information about these estimates, see "The scope of child recruitment in the Burma army," *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002), 103-106.

[13] Human Rights Education Institute of Burma (HREIB), *Despite Promises: Child Soldiers in Burma's Armed Forces* (Chiang Mai: HREIB, 2006).

[14] "Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers", *Child Soldiers Global Report 2004*, 191.

[15] Asian Human Rights Commission, *Children and the People's War in Nepal*, January 22, 2003.
[16] Human Rights Watch interview, August 29, 2006.
[17] Child Workers in Nepal (CWIN), "Children in Armed Conflict," Factsheet, March 2006.
[18] Human Rights Watch interviews, Batticaloa district, August 2006.
[19] In one typical incident documented by Human Rights Watch, twenty-six people, mostly children, were recruited on July 31, 2004 from a festival at the Thandamalay Murugan temple in Batticaloa.
[20] See *Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004).
[21] Charu Lata Hogg, *Child Recruitment in South Asian Conflicts: A Comparative Analysis of Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2006, 10.
[22] Although child abduction by the Karuna group was not unknown prior to 2006, it was relatively rare, with only nine cases documented by UNICEF during 2004 and 2005.
[23] See Human Rights Watch, *Complicit in Crime: State Collusion and Abduction and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007).
[24] See Human Rights Watch, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007).
[25] Interview, location withheld for security reasons, August 2006.
[26] Interview with "Leela", Butwal, Nepal, March 5, 2006.
[27] See Human Rights Watch, *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch 2002).
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 27.
[30] Interviews conducted near the Thai-Burma border, March 2002.
[31] Boys who were trained in various training camps in each year between 1993 and 2001 gave similar accounts of such treatment, demonstrating that this is standard punishment for attempted escape. See *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch 2002), 68-71.
[32] See Human Rights Watch, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007).
[33] Interview with "Bikram" in Kathmandu, Nepal, May 1, 2006.
[34] See Human Rights Watch, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007), 26-31.
[35] Interview with UN official, Batticaloa, August 2004.
[36] Interview with "Arun," Kilinochchi, August 2004.
[37] Interview, Trincomalee district, August 2004.
[38] Of 6,098 cases of LTTE child recruitment documented by UNICEF since 2002, approximately 40 percent of cases were girls. In two of the nine districts monitored (Kilinochchi and Mulaitivu), girls accounted for the majority of children recruited. Statistics provided by UNICEF, April 9, 2007.
[39] Shobha Gautam, Amrita Banskota, and Rita Manchanda, "Where there are no men: Women in the Maoists Insurgency in Nepal," in *Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal*, Deepak Thapa, ed., (Kathmandu: Martin Chautari, 2003), 94.
[40] Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Child Soldiers Global Report 2001, 342.

[41] Interivew with "Kalawoti," Butwal, Nepal, March 5, 2006.
[42] See Human Right Watch, *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).
[43] Somasundaram DJ, *Child Trauma* (Jaffna: University of Jaffna, 1993).
[44] Interview with "Marudan," Kilinochchi, August 2004.
[45] Interview with "Sivani," Batticaloa district, August 2004.
[46] Interview with "Meh Reh," Thailand, March 2002.
[47] Interview with "Saw Ler Wah," Karen State, Burma, March 2002.
[48] United Nations Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID), cited in Human Rights Watch, *Clear Culpability: "Disappearances" by Security Forces in Nepal* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005), 1.
[49] See Human Rights Watch, *Clear Culpability: "Disappearances" by Security Forces in Nepal* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005).
[50] Interview with "Kalawoti," Butwal, Nepal, March 5, 2006.
[51] Interview, location withheld for security reasons, August 2006.