



## **(World Alliance for Peace in Sri Lanka)**

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## **Media Release**

### **URGENT INTERNATIONAL ACTION REQUIRED TO PREVENT LTTE CHILD CONSCRIPTION UNDER THE COVER OF TSUNAMI RELIEF**

There have been numerous independent reports that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is conscripting children orphaned or displaced by the Tsunami that savaged the coastal areas of Sri Lanka on 26 December 2004.

UNICEF, the United Nations Children Authority, has identified over 40 verifiable cases of child recruitment from Tsunami relief camps in Eastern Sri Lanka.

Fr. Harry Miller, an American Jesuit priest based at St. Michaels College Batticaloa, also says “The LTTE is abusing this disaster in order to increase its influence in the east.... At this moment, the LTTE is recruiting child soldiers in the camps. The orphaned children are especially vulnerable. It is open hunting season for the Tigers.” (De Volksrant – 07 January 2005).

The University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), an organisation of Tamil academics, in its latest Information Bulletin No. 37 ([www.uthr.org](http://www.uthr.org)), describes how the LTTE not only used the Tsunami to increase child conscription, but makes every attempt to prevent the increasing links between the Tamil population and the Sri Lankan security forces who were the first to provide help to many Tamils. The UTHR (J) bulletin states, “Even amidst this chaos and tragedy, there are reports of killing and child conscription by the LTTE, one relating to three girls rescued by the police while being taken to the LTTE-controlled area at Omanthai. There is no doubt what will happen to many children in refugee camps where the LTTE has established control”.

These post-tsunami revelations follow the comprehensive report entitled ‘LIVING IN FEAR - Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka’ by the US based Human Rights Watch ([www.hrw.org](http://www.hrw.org) - November 2004). This study includes many first hand accounts from Tamil children in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, and tells a horrifying tale of intimidation, abductions and beatings conducted by the self-proclaimed ‘sole representatives’ of the Tamil people in the name of a mythical separate state of Tamil Eelam.

The HRW report, which concludes that the LTTE forcibly recruited thousands of child soldiers since active fighting ended in 2002, supports earlier reports by Amnesty International, UNICEF, as well as Sri Lankan sources, that the LTTE continues to use the Norwegian brokered Ceasefire to entrench its fascist one-party rule in parts of Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, and highlights the dangers of granting an Interim Self Governing Authority (ISGA) as demanded by LTTE.

In UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s latest report on “Children and Armed Conflict” it is stated that since 2001 Sri Lanka’s Tamil Tigers had recruited over 4700 children, some as young as 11. The report, which is expected to be debated by the UN Security Council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February states during 2004 alone, more than 1000 cases of new or re-recruitments, of which a high percentage were girls, were reported to UNICEF.

In keeping with its past record, the LTTE has rejected these reports, and attempts to discredit and intimidate those who dare to challenge its authority. A subsequent HRW article on 21/12/2004 states that in Toronto, Canada, a public forum on child soldiers was repeatedly disrupted by 'presumed LTTE supporters' with shouting and heckling, as well as by photographing and video taping participants. Furthermore, 'following the event, Human Rights Watch offices in both Toronto and New York received phone calls from apparent LTTE supporters threatening to expose the identities of local Tamils who had contacts with Human Rights Watch in a manner that would place them at risk'. "In light of past intimidation and violence by Tamil Tiger supporters against Toronto's Sri Lankan Tamil community, these ominous calls to our offices give us real cause for concern," said Brad Adams, executive director of HRW Asia Division.

Another continuing theme in many reports on child conscription is the involvement of the Tamils Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), which the UTHR (J) refers to as the "Cats Paw of LTTE Terror on the Ground". The TRO, which has been accused of siphoning off humanitarian aid and Tamil Diaspora funds towards LTTE arms procurement, and of running 'transit centres' for the re-recruitment of 'released' child soldiers, now has uncontrolled access to Tsunami refugees in LTTE controlled areas. Not surprisingly, the HRW report also makes explicit recommendations related to the activities of the TRO.

The World Alliance for Peace in Sri Lanka (WAPS) deplores the actions of the LTTE and its front organisations, and urges immediate implementations of the following specific recommendations made by Human Rights Watch (on pages 10 to 13 of the report).

#### **To the United Nations Security Council**

- In accordance with Security Council Resolution 1539 on children and armed conflict (April 22, 2004), paragraph 6; adopt targeted measures to address the LTTE's failure to end child recruitment. Such measures could include the imposition of travel restrictions on leaders and their exclusion from any governance structures and amnesty provisions, a ban on the supply of small arms, a ban on military assistance, and restriction on the flow of financial resources.
- Local Colombo missions of the Security Council should meet with the LTTE to insist on progress in the release of children, in accordance with Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict.

#### **To All United Nations Member States**

- In accordance with Security Council resolution 1379 on children and armed conflict (November 20, 2001), paragraph 9, use all legal, political, diplomatic, financial, and material measures to ensure respect for international norms for the protection of children by the parties to the conflict. In particular, states should unequivocally condemn the LTTE's continued recruitment and use of child soldiers and withhold any financial, political, or military support to the LTTE until it ends all child recruitment and releases all children currently in its ranks.

#### **To the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**

- Set firm benchmarks and deadlines for LTTE compliance with its commitments to end child recruitment and release children from its forces; if the LTTE fails to meet the benchmarks by the specified deadline, suspend operations at the transit centers, including any funds going to the TRO for center operations.
- Continue and strengthen efforts to prevent child recruitment, including re-recruitment of former child soldiers.
- Strengthen communication and working relationships with local communities and local non-governmental organizations in order to effectively monitor child recruitment, put in place

effective prevention strategies, and better support affected families, including their efforts to resist child recruitment.

- Intervene rapidly in cases of child recruitment by raising cases with the LTTE as quickly as possible and accompanying families, when possible, in requesting the return of their children.

**To Donors (including Japan, the United States, the European Union, and Scandinavian countries)**

- Create a donor task force for close liaison with UNICEF and other local actors and to make urgent interventions with the LTTE in cases of new recruitment.
- Provide financial and logistical support for the deployment of international human rights monitors in support of the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka as envisioned in the Hakone talks.
- Consider the appropriateness of channeling economic assistance through agencies, such as the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, that are linked to the LTTE.
- Use economic leverage to pressure the LTTE to put an end to all child recruitment by the LTTE and to promote the release of all children currently in the LTTE's ranks.

**To Governments of Countries with a Significant Tamil Diaspora (including Canada, Switzerland, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Scandinavia)**

- Clearly communicate condemnation of the LTTE's child recruitment practices to members of the Tamil diaspora through both the Tamil and mainstream media and meetings with their leaders.

The World Alliance for Peace in Sri Lanka (WAPS) firmly believes that the above recommendations by Human Rights Watch form a basis for decisive action on the critical issue of LTTE Child Conscription in Sri Lanka.

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