

Press Release on underage recruits in LTTE ranks

Child Protection Authority

UN bodies and ending underage recruitment within LTTE ranks

The Child Protection Authority (CPA), with the full cooperation of the LTTE, has undertaken an accelerated release of underage youths within its ranks and an extensive monitoring and education program to LTTE members to prevent future underage recruitment. In areas that are under the LTTE's full control, that is the five northern districts, the program is reaching completion. In the three eastern districts the program was kick started, but progress so far is slow due to the prevailing politico-military situation. However, the CPA is actively pushing for progress of the program in the east as well.

There are three aspects of this program undertaken by the CPA to which United Nations bodies have given only partial support.

1. Minimum age of recruitment

There are several international instruments that specify minimum age of recruitment. There are inconsistencies among them. In the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) of 1989, 15 is the minimum age. Only in one instrument, the Option Protocol to the CRC of 2001, the minimum age of 18 is specified. The LTTE has recently set the minimum age of recruitment at 17 and the minimum age for combat duty at 18.

The minimum age of 17 is maintained because the LTTE is much more than a military outfit. It provides extensive civil services in many areas of civilian life, such as health, education, child care, law-and-order, and environmental protection in which LTTE members take part. That only in LTTE areas in this island there are no children or women begging in the street attest to the extensive social welfare services provided by the LTTE. Many young persons entering the LTTE ranks are also trained as doctors, engineers, and in many other professions.

2. Those passed the minimum age

Nowhere in any international instruments it is stated that underage recruits who have passed the minimum age must be released from the organization. UN bodies are refusing to acknowledge this and instead maintain that all those recruited underage must be released, even if they are over the minimum age for recruitment. Many who fall in this category are respected leaders within the LTTE.

3. Vocation centre for war-affected children

The CPA has placed some of the released underage recruits in a vocational centre for war-affected children. Children receive academic as well as vocational training at this centre.

The decision to place the children at this centre is taken mainly for one of three reasons: unwillingness of the child to return to his or her family, risk of returning to government-controlled areas, and risk to the child if returned to the family where the child will enter a situation of child abuse or child labour.

UN bodies demanding that the youths must be released to the family if the family desires so have ignored all of these risks and have instead given top priority to the family's demand to have the youth back. In several cases, the CPA has found, the family, demanding the return of the girl child, has no intention of continuing with her education and instead wants her back to perform domestic chores!!

The current statistics on underage (under 17) recruitment

At the start of the accelerated release program in December 2006, the status of the underage database was as follows.

In the five northern districts - 261

In the three eastern districts - 142

The current statistics of underage recruits within the LTTE stands as follows:

There are 65 cases in the database from the five northern districts who yet to be traced. A further 90 cases are learning at the vocation centre. There are 142 cases from the three eastern districts. An accelerated release of these eastern district cases will be undertaken.

Rules for human affairs

The CPA would like to re-state that human affairs cannot be judged strictly on rules alone. Context needs to be taken into account and rules need to be flexible to deliver justice in a particular circumstance. UN bodies must be mindful of this basic truism in human affairs when assessing the efforts by the LTTE to end underage recruitment within its ranks.

27 January 2007

--

Peace Secretariat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamileelam.

Kilinochchi.

Tamileelam.