

## Statement on the use of Child Soldiers



KARENNI NATIONAL PROGRESSIVE PARTY HEADQUARTERS

Statement No. 01/06

We, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) would like to make clear our stance on the use of child soldiers.

According to article 29(5) of the Karenni State Constitution, which was ratified in 1973 at the National Congress, all underage children shall be free from conscription to army service.

However, during the 1970-1980 period of the resistance movement, a number of young people under the age of 18 voluntarily joined the Karenni Army, the military wing of the KNPP, with the aim of retaliation, motivated by bitter resentment caused by seeing family members killed or maltreated by the Burmese army. Many were orphans, or had become separated from their families as a result of action by the Burmese army. Contrary to claims by outside parties these so-called 'child soldiers' never numbered more than 100 persons. Furthermore these young people were encouraged by the KNPP to go to schools run by the organization to pursue an education rather than becoming soldiers. These schools were not used for military recruitment and the students were not encouraged by the KNPP to serve in the army when they finished school. Some of those educated by the KNPP did subsequently voluntarily join the army, some as soldiers, but other to serve in auxiliary fields, such as as medics, schoolteachers or office staff. Often this decision was motivated by the lack of alternative employment due to the young people's refugee status.

Since 1980, underage soldiers have gradually decreased and they can rarely be seen in the Karenni Army. A significant number have benefited by returning to school.

On occasions some local authorities inside Karenni State required locals to join the militia for self-defense when the Burmese military were carrying out scorched-earth military operations in the area. This recruitment was for the purposes of self-defense and recruits were not considered to be soldiers and therefore they were not subject to the same terms and conditions as the regular army. They were regarded as a temporary defense force.

The KNPP reviews and amends its State Constitution every four-year at the party congress to re-affirm its adherence to the provisions of the constitution and make changes as necessary in the light of changing circumstances. In view of the fact that our Constitution clearly prohibits the recruitment of child soldiers, we, the KNPP, would publicly like to reiterate our stance that we do not conscript conscripted underage youths, or even adults, to be soldiers in the movement against the Burmese regime.

Executive Committee, Karenni National Progressive Party  
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