

Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)

Statement No. 02/2007



In response to the UN's report on the use of Child Soldiers by Non-State Actors in Burma

Dated: November 26, 2007

On the 23rd November 2007 Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, issued a report on the use of Child Soldiers in Burma in which he condemned the use of child soldiers both by the Burmese military and the non-state armed groups operating in the ethnic areas. The Karenni Army's name was included in the list of offenders.

The Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) refutes the allegation that there are child soldiers in its ranks and wishes to state its disappointment over the way all its efforts to comply with international conventions have been ignored by the United Nations.

On April 13th 2007, following two meetings with UNICEF, KNPP (the political wing of the Karenni Army) signed a Deed of Commitment promising to end child recruitment, demobilizing children in the force and allowing outsiders to independently monitor our compliance.

UNICEF failed to meet with the KNPP to witness the signature as arranged. On April 14th 2007 this Deed of Commitment was sent to Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy, Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict at the UN in New York, with a copy to the UN's Bangkok office, but it was never acknowledged.

We have on many occasions invited both the UN (including their Rangoon representative) and UNICEF to visit our Karenni Army (KA) bases and offered them open access, but they have not responded in any way to our invitations to monitor the KA.

In the past some young men voluntarily approached the KA as they wished to participate in the armed struggle against the Tatmadaw, but the KA did not allow them to enlist as regular soldiers; instead they tried to persuade them to continue their education and in many instances supported their studies. The KNPP issued a statement in August 2006 to make its stance clear on the use of child soldiers and to reiterate that it was abiding by the Karenni State Constitution's article 29(5), ratified in 1973 at the National Congress, that all underage children shall be free from conscription to army service.

While announcing the report the Secretary General criticized the government of Burma for denying U.N. official access to areas where "guerrilla groups operate", leaving investigators

unable to verify the reports of children in their ranks, thus confirming that this report is based on hearsay and old reports.

In October this year Human Rights Watch also issued its own report: “Sold to Be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma.” Human Rights Watch have sent researchers to the border recently and they stated: “Although previous Human Rights Watch research found children present in the Karenni Army, our current investigation found no evidence of recruitment or use of child soldiers by the group.” Furthermore Human Rights Watch recommended “that the Karenni Army (KA) be removed from the secretary-general’s list of parties to armed conflict in violation of international norms prohibiting the recruitment and use of child soldiers” (<http://hrw.org/reports/2007/burma1007/2.htm> October 2007).

Once again we, the KNPP, appeal to the UN and other international organizations to review the current situation and remove our name of KNPP/KA from the lists of organizations that use child soldiers.

Central Committee
Karenni National Progressive Party