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Sri Lanka: Tamil Tigers beating up families to recruit child soldiers

The Tamil Tigers are increasingly turning to threats and violence in a recruitment drive for child soldiers. Families who resist have been beaten with wooden sticks, or had their houses set on fire.

"With today's news of a suicide bombing in Colombo, the fact that the Tamil Tigers have started a new wave of child recruitment is alarming," said Amnesty International. "If the armed conflict were to resume, these children would likely be among the first to die."

Since the beginning of April 2004, 190 children have been recruited to fight, according to information provided by UNICEF. This brings the number of verified cases this year to 330.

Many of these children have been forcibly abducted from public places or their homes. Some of the new recruits are as young as fourteen.

The Tamil Tigers are also increasingly re-recruiting former child soldiers by force. In one case in May, four children who had left the Tamil Tigers were taken away from their homes in the middle of the night. Their families say they were violently assaulted when they tried to intervene.

In another case, Tamil Tigers set fire to a house in Sinnathatumunai, eastern Sri Lanka, and broke down the doors of nine others.

In the eastern Vaharai area, relatives were beaten with wooden sticks when they tried to stop their children being taken away. In one instance a woman was knocked unconscious, and another was cut on the face. Both needed medical treatment.

"The Tamil Tigers leadership must issue orders to its cadres to stop these violent and intimidating tactics immediately," said Amnesty International. "It should stick to its earlier commitments to stop the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Children in its ranks should be returned to their homes and not face the threat of re-recruitment."

Last year over 1,200 children were enlisted as soldiers, but in June 2003 the Tamil Tigers promised to stop using children in a joint agreement, *Action Plan for Children affected by War*.

Background

Amnesty International is concerned about the intensification of the recruitment of children by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tamil Tigers), especially amid the fragile state of the peace process. Efforts by the Government of Norway to restart peace talks which stalled in April 2003 so far have not borne any results.

A variety of factors have destabilized the relationship between the Government of President Chandrika Kumaratunga Bandaranaike and the LTTE. One such factor has been by accusations by the LTTE that the military is supporting a former LTTE eastern commander, Colonel Karuna. Karuna, after internal fighting in mid-April, went underground with hundreds of LTTE members loyal to him. Other members, including many children, returned home. These are among the children reported as being re-recruited by the LTTE in the last few weeks.

The LTTE signed *Action Plan for Children Affected by War* in June 2003 together with the Sri Lankan government, UN agencies, and the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation.

Public Document

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