



Remove kids from army – UN envoy

Publication date: Sunday, 11th June, 2006

ACTION: Premier Apolo Nsibambi, UNICEF's Martin Mogwanja, Coomaraswamy and Museveni

By Vision Reporter

THE Special representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, Radhika coomaraswamy, has urged Uganda to remove children from armed forces and reintegrate them. addressing journalists in Kampala on Saturday, coomara-swamy said she found some children recruited in the UPDF and Local Defence Units during her tour in the war-ravaged north.

"Although recruitment and use of children is not government policy and the UPDF act explicitly prohibits it, some children have slipped through the cracks in procedures, ending up in the LDUs and other government armed forces," said Coomaraswamy.

She spoke to the press after meeting President Yoweri Museveni.

Museveni, while meeting Coomaraswamy, protested over what he called the arbitrary method of work by the UN that has resulted in the blacklisting of Uganda among the countries accused of violating the rights of children.

A State House statement on Saturday quoted the President as saying his government had never recruited children in the army and disclosed that the only exception was when children ran to the military to seek refuge in the NRA-controlled areas during the liberation war in the early 1980s.

Museveni told coomara-swamy that the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, should not rely on information from Olara Otuunu, coomara-swamy's predecessor, who he said was involved in criminal acts in Uganda.

Museveni said Uganda had taken steps to protect the rights of children.

Coomaraswamy condemned the war crimes of the LRA rebels.

The UN children's agency (UNICEF) believes LRA have abducted over 20,000 children and forced them to be soldiers and sex slaves.

Ends



UN envoy urges Uganda to demobilize juveniles

12 June 2006 [BBC Monitoring Africa](#)

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Text of unattributed report entitled "Remove kids from army - UN envoy" published by Ugandan newspaper [The New Vision website](#) on 12 June

The Special representative of the UN Secretary-General for children and armed conflict, Radhika **Coomaraswamy**, has urged Uganda to remove children from armed forces and reintegrate them.

Addressing journalists in Kampala on Saturday [11 June], **Coomaraswamy** said she found some children recruited in the UPDF [Uganda People's Defence Forces] and Local Defence Units [LDUs] during her tour in the war-ravaged north.

"Although recruitment and use of children is not government policy and the UPDF Act explicitly prohibits it, some children have slipped through the cracks in procedures, ending up in the LDUs and other government armed forces," said **Coomaraswamy**. She spoke to the press after meeting President Yoweri Museveni.

Museveni, while meeting **Coomaraswamy**, protested over what he called the arbitrary method of work by the UN that has resulted in the blacklisting of Uganda among the countries accused of violating the rights of children.

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Museveni told **Coomaraswamy** that the UN secretary general, Kofi Annan, should not rely on information from Olara Otuunu, **Coomaraswamy**'s predecessor, who he said was involved in criminal acts in Uganda.

Museveni said Uganda had taken steps to protect the rights of children. **Coomaraswamy** condemned the war crimes of the LRA rebels. The UN children's agency (UNICEF) believes LRA have abducted over 20,000 children and forced them to be soldiers and sex slaves.

Source: The New Vision website, Kampala, in English 12 Jun 06



Ugandan president protests country's inclusion on UN rights blacklist

11 June 2006 [BBC Monitoring Africa](#)

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Excerpt from report by [Radio Uganda](#) on 11 June

President Yoweri Museveni has protested over the arbitrary method of work by the United Nations that has resulted into the blacklisting of Uganda among the countries that are accused of violating the rights of children.

The president made this protest to yesterday during a meeting at State House Nakasero [in Kampala] with the UN undersecretary-general and special representative of the UN secretary-general for children and armed conflict, Ms Radhika **Coomaraswamy**.

Mr Museveni requested [that] the UN secretary-general should not rely on Mr Olara Otunnu [former special representative of the UN secretary-general for children and armed conflict], who was involved in criminal activities in Uganda like the massive violations of human rights. He condemned Otunnu for continuing to misinform the United Nations Security Council against Uganda.

He (?proclaimed) that the NRM government has never recruited children in the army and disclosed that the only exception was the children ran to the then NRA [National Resistance Army] during the liberation struggle to seek refuge in the NRA-controlled areas.

President Museveni therefore told Ms **Coomaraswamy** who was accompanied by the UNICEF officials that Uganda was wrongly enlisted among the countries that recruit children in the army.

He told his visitors that it is an offence under Ugandan law to recruit children into the army. He informed them that after the NRM [ruling National Resistance Movement] came into power in 1986, it took children to kadogo [young fighters] school in Mbarara to help them attain education, adding that many of them have since qualified in different fields and are now mature, independent people.

On the conflict in northern Uganda, President Museveni told his guests that the main problem was caused by the Sudan who used to supports terrorists.

Ms **Coomaraswamy** expressed happiness that the government of Uganda had taken steps to protect the rights of children. [Passage omitted]

Source: UBC Radio, Kampala, in English 1000 gmt 11 Jun 06

Xinhua, the Official New China News Agency

Ugandan president protests UN black listing

10 June 2006 [Xinhua News Agency](#)

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KAMPALA, June 10 (Xinhua) -- Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has protested over what he called the arbitrary method of work by the United Nations that has resulted in the blacklisting of the east African country among the countries accused of violating the rights of children.

According to a State House statement on Saturday, the president made his protests during a meeting with Radhika **Coomaraswamy**, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict held at State House.

The president said that his government has never recruited children in the army and disclosed that the only exception was when children ran to the military to seek refuge in the NRA controlled areas during the liberation war in the early 1980's.

He told **Coomaraswamy**, who was accompanied by UNICEF officials, that Uganda was wrongly enlisted among countries that recruit children in the army, noting that Uganda has taken steps to protect the rights of children.

Coomaraswamy in a news conference held after meeting Museveni urged Uganda to work out an action plan for the removal of any children found to have slipped into the armed forces and to ensure their re-integration.

She said she found some children have been recruited into the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and the Local Defense Unit during her tour in the war-ravaged northern Uganda for the last few days.

"Although recruitment and use of children is not government policy and that the UPDF act explicitly prohibits it, some children have slipped through the cracks in procedures ending up in the LDUs and other government armed forces," said **Coomaraswamy**.

She also condemned the gross violations and war crimes of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The UNICEF believed LRA have abducted over 20,000 children and forced them to be soldiers and sex slaves.

The LRA have been fighting the Ugandan government for the last 20 years, leaving tens of thousands of people killed and over 1.4 million homeless in northern Uganda.

"I have been able to see with my eyes the suffering of the children there. I visited internally displaced person's camps in Gulu and Pader," said the envoy, who was in Uganda invited by the government.



UN Takes On Govt Over Child Soldiers

by Wandera W'ouma & Martin Luther Oketch

13 June 2006

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Kampala, Jun 13, 2006 (The Monitor/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --

A SENIOR United Nations officer has called on the government of Uganda to take disciplinary measures against recruitment of children into military ranks.

Ms Radhika **Coomaraswamy**, the UN Under Secretary General for Children in Armed Conflicts said during a press conference at Unicef offices in Kampala on Saturday that there was need for proper government policy on children who have already slipped into the military and to put measures to stop the practice.

She has been on a one-week fact finding mission on the humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected district of northern Uganda with a particular focus on the conflict's impact on the lives of children and families.

"During my visit, I have been able to see the suffering of the children there," she said.

"I visited camps in Gulu and Pader and spoke with camp officials, local councillors as well as women and girls."

Coomaraswamy said, "Disciplinary action should be taken against civilians and military officials, who are responsible for mobilisation and recruitment of children" she said.

Coomaraswamy called for negotiations between the government of Uganda and the UN to formulate an action plan to address the issue.

She met President Yoweri Museveni, Prime Minister Apollo Nsubambi, Defence Minister Crispus Kiyonga and Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Kuteesa.

The official called for disciplinary action against officials responsible for the practice and to put in place legislation to counter the vice.

The UN classifies enlisting of children in military activities as an abuse of their rights.

The government denies being involved in the practice.

Museveni said the only exception was the children that run to then NRA rebels to seek refugee in the NRA - controlled areas.

"The UN Secretary General should not rely on Mr Olara Otunnu who was involved in criminal activities in Uganda, like the massive violation of human rights. NRM has never recruited children in the army," he said.

UGANDA: Interview with Radhika Coomaraswamy, special representative for children and armed conflict



© Vincent Mayanja/IRIN
**Radhika Coomaraswamy, the
 UN Secretary General's
 Special Representative for
 Children and Armed Conflict**

KAMPALA, 13 Jun 2006 (IRIN) - Radhika Coomaraswamy is the special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. During her mission to Uganda from 3-10 June, Coomaraswamy visited the north to assess the situation of children affected by the 20-year conflict between the government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The following excerpts are from an interview with IRIN on 10 June, at the end of her visit.

QUESTION: How would you describe the situation in northern Uganda?

ANSWER: Having spent a lot of time in Gulu and Pader districts, I saw for myself some of the issues that relate primarily to the armed conflict. I came with a much-focused mandate to look at children in the context of armed conflict; I did not come to look at the general humanitarian situation in the north. I talked to some of the children who were abducted, as well as those living in the camps. They raised clearly the LRA abuses and atrocities that could stand out in one's mind when you are talking with them. Children have quite horrific tales they have to tell.

Secondly, I came because of Security Council Resolution 1612, which set up a monitoring and reporting mechanism to monitor grave violations against children during armed conflict. The resolution also has an annex that lists parties that especially recruit child soldiers and commit other grave violations. The resolution lists both the Lord's Resistance Army and the government of Uganda especially with regard to child recruitment. So I came to see for myself the situation on the ground, see what can be done.

My findings to some extent are, firstly, that there is no doubt that the LRA recruitment and use of children as well as other abuses is perhaps the worst possible violation with regard to children in armed conflict in northern Uganda. We as an office condemn these violations, and we support the ICC [International Criminal Court] in dealing with these issues.

With regard to the government of Uganda, we found that there is no policy or programme that specifically deals with child recruitment. The government of Uganda assured us that no such policy exists, and we did not find any policy on the ground. However, we found that in Gulu and Pader, children are being absorbed into the LDU [local defence units, government-allied militia groups] especially, as well as the UPDF [Uganda People's Defence Forces, the national army]. This is due to a number of factors, but there is a reality of children being in the LDU and the UPDF. We have now negotiated with the government of Uganda. I have just met with the president today, and we have agreed on some principles to deal with the specific issue relating to child combatants or child soldiers who may be in the LDU and the UPDF.

In addition, we found there was a particular situation with vulnerable girls in northern Uganda relating to sexual exploitation and violence. For that general problem, we did speak to the government about reports from many young girls that there is a situation of sexual exploitation on the part of military personnel. We have had a discussion with government about sexual exploitation that takes place and the need to get enforceable guidelines and training of military personnel to prevent this exploitation of girls.

We discussed with local government officials the issues of reintegration, child-headed households, the humanitarian situation on the ground and the children's schooling and other issues. But I came with a very specific task of getting this action plan and getting a monitoring and reporting mechanism off the ground here, linked to that action plan to some extent. In that sense we have been successful.

Q: What do you and the government think would remedy child recruitment and abuse?

A: We agreed on four principles: The government and Unicef [the UN Children's Fund] will work out an action plan for the prevention, removal and integration of any child soldiers found in LDU or UPDF; we have agreed that the government of Uganda will strengthen measures with regard to taking disciplinary action against

armed forces personnel who knowingly recruit children in the LDU or UPDF; we have made arrangements to strengthen existing procedures for access of designated personnel from Unicef, from the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Uganda Human Rights Commission to go to military installations for the purpose of verifying whether there are children in the armed forces; and the government is seriously considering enacting criminal legislation to prevent and to punish those who abet the mobilisation of children into the armed forces.

Q: Based on your discussions with children in the north, how serious is the problem of sexual violence?

A: There is sexual violence, but I think there is even more sexual exploitation. What happens is that people who have power then use that power to extract sexual favours, promising a certain benefit. A lot of young girls are taken up by benefits offered by military personnel and also officials, and they become pregnant at a young age.

We have discussed with the government the need to strengthen the disciplinary procedures, to devise enforceable guidelines and to train the military personnel to deal with this problem on the ground. I must say there were responses, and we hope they will take the necessary action. Unicef and other agencies will follow up on this because we feel that sexual exploitation and violence are important issues that came up when we talked to women in the camps.

We also looked into problems relating to child-headed households and special needs that children can face. It was also our concern about the security situation and the need to make sure that the indicators from the camps, especially with regard to children, are moved beyond the emergency levels so that things like malnutrition, healthcare, education of children in the camps are dealt with.

Q: What did the women and children tell you was their preference with regard to peace?

A: Security is the issue for most people, but at the same time they want justice. They get very angry when people who have been terrorising them don't get tried. They support the ICC. They have seen some [LRA] commanders who have come out and been treated very well, and this angers many of them. There is that tension, and I think the politicians need to understand that and deal with both those issues.

There are also some grievances about investment, employment and education. Those issues should be part of the political package. If you want to solve that problem in the long term, unless you have those employment figures up, you get those education figures up, health figures up, there will always be grievances and unhappiness.

Q: You have talked about the ICC, but bearing in mind that more than 80 percent of the LRA are abducted children, how do you balance what northern Uganda's traditional justice system provides and what the ICC wants to achieve?

A: Sierra Leone is the formula for that, which is that only those who have the greatest responsibility should be tried by the ICC and the rest are tried in local truth and reconciliation processes. They could have the traditional process, or they could want to institute something like the South African truth and reconciliation commission. But I think that those who bear the greatest responsibility have to be prosecuted.

In northern Uganda, we also discussed issues relating to the need to strengthen civilian processes, especially the judiciary and the police, to make sure that crimes or violence against children are properly prosecuted in the courts of law. We found that the justice system was not fully operational.

Q: What areas do you think require investment in this respect?

A: We have to give those young people some alternatives to joining the army or being sexually exploited. There must be investments so they can have employment and other opportunities to move on.

On one hand I want to say that Uganda has agreed today to some extent to take children out of their armed forces. But also steps must be taken to improve the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda to make sure that children can get back to their normal life.

I had lively discussions with regard to the integration of children into the community. This is the debate that will be taken at various levels. We need to ensure that on one hand they [children] are not stigmatised by being put together, but at the same time there are measures being taken to deal with their vulnerability and special needs.

The Monitor (Uganda) - AAGM: UN Takes On Govt Over Child Soldiers.

Wandera W'ouma & Martin Luther Oketch = 13 June 2006

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She has been on a one-week fact finding mission on the humanitarian situation in the conflict-affected district of northern Uganda with a particular focus on the conflict's impact on the lives of children and families.

"During my visit, I have been able to see the suffering of the children there," she said.

"I visited camps in Gulu and Pader and spoke with camp officials, local councillors as well as women and girls."

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Coomaraswamy called for negotiations between the government of Uganda and the UN to formulate an action plan to address the issue.

She met President Yoweri Museveni, Prime Minister Apollo Nsibambi, Defence Minister Crispus Kiyonga and Foreign Affairs Minister Sam Kuteesa.

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Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media. (allafrica.com)

VOA NEWS: UGANDA PROMISES TO STOP RECRUITING CHILD SOLDIERS

16 June 2006 [US Fed News](#) English

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GENEVA, June 16 -- The Voice of America issued the following story: By Lisa Schlein

The U.N. special representative for children and armed conflict says Uganda must take action to stop the recruiting of child soldiers. The U.N. official recently returned from a trip to Uganda, where she spoke with former child soldiers recruited by the government and by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army.

Sri Lankan lawyer and human rights advocate Radhika **Coomaraswamy** assumed the post of U.N. special representative for children and armed conflict two months ago. She chose Uganda as her first visit because, she says, of the particularly tragic circumstances of thousands of children who have been abducted by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA.

Coomaraswamy visited Gulu and Pader Districts in northern Uganda, where she spoke with many children who had been abducted by the LRA. She says it was difficult to speak with them and not be moved and angered by the stories they had to tell.

"It is a horrific tale of abduction, sexual slavery and children made to kill their own parents and engage in all kinds of horrendous activity," she said. "And, these children that I spoke to in the North of Uganda were children that suffered deeply, and many of them showed visible signs of trauma, and found it very difficult to live with the actions that they committed."

Coomaraswamy says the LRA has abducted tens of thousands of children over more than 10 years. She calls this the worst possible violation with regard to children and armed conflict in Uganda.

She says it is hard to gauge the number of children that have been drafted into the Ugandan army, but estimates the number at between 1,000 and 5,000. She says the government of Uganda does not have any conscious policy, program or project to specifically recruit children.

However, she says, children are drafted into the army because of the need for more troops in northern Uganda, corruption and other issues.

"What happens is children do join," she said. "Many of them want to join, because, having been child soldiers early on, because there is nothing else to do. There are no other alternatives in those camps. This is the only way to get income even for the families, and the families sometimes collude in this. And, so, as a result, the children are taken in to the armed forces. So, we made a very clear statement to the government that this is just not acceptable."

Coomaraswamy says the Ugandan government has agreed to strengthen implementation of existing laws and policies regarding child soldiers. It also has agreed to introduce legislation to make child recruitment a criminal offense, punishable under the law.



Uganda to boost monitoring for child soldiers -U.N.

By Laura MacInnis = 391 words = 16 June 2006 - 13:31

Reuters News = English = (c) 2006 Reuters Limited

GENEVA, June 16 (Reuters) - Up to 5,000 children still serve in the Ugandan armed forces even though they are officially banned from enlisting, a senior U.N. official said on Friday.

While the numbers are small compared to those in the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has up to 25,000 children in its ranks, the Ugandan government has agreed to tighten controls, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's special representative for children and armed conflict said.

"There seems to be some failure in the process," Radhika **Coomaraswamy** told reporters in Geneva after a trip to northern Uganda where a 20-year conflict still rages between the government and the LRA.

U.N. children's agency UNICEF defines a child soldier as any child under 18 years of age who is part of regular or irregular armed forces.

Coomaraswamy, a Sri Lankan lawyer, said although the Ugandan army was not consciously recruiting children, many young people joined for lack of other things to do, and others were forced in by family or other pressures.

She said Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni had promised to reinforce measures against the recruitment of children and their use in armed conflict.

The east African country will work with UNICEF to draw up an action plan by the end of August on ways to better implement its existing laws, Coomaraswamy said.

The agreement does not extend to the LRA, which Coomaraswamy identified as "the primary violator" in Uganda.

Many LRA child fighters have been traumatised by the horrors they have witnessed, committed and were subjected to, she said.

Extricating children from the LRA could take substantial measures, including the restoration of peace in the region or more indictments from the International Criminal Court against the group's leaders, Coomaraswamy said.

She estimated that 250,000 children worldwide were affected by armed conflict, either as child soldiers or victims of attacks, abductions or sexual assaults.

In addition to Uganda, child soldiers are found in Burundi, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Chad, Sudan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Colombia, with most linked to militia groups, Coomaraswamy said.

The Monitor (Uganda) - AAGM: UPDF Has 5,000 Child Soldiers - UN.

Peter Nyanzi = 19 June 2006 - [The Monitor](#)

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AN estimated 5,000 children are serving in the Ugandan armed forces which violates the United Nations Security Council resolutions, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, has said.

The Voice of America reported on Friday that Ms Radhika **Coomaraswamy**, who has been on a tour of Uganda, told reporters in Geneva that recruitment of child soldiers was still a problem.

She said she had met President Yoweri Museveni who agreed to tighten controls against the practice in line with the Security Council Resolution 1612.

The resolution adopted in July last year, listed both the LRA and the government of Uganda as culprits with regard to child recruitment.

Coomaraswamy said the President had agreed to strengthen implementation of existing laws and policies regarding child soldiers. She said though the government of Uganda did not have any conscious policy to specifically recruit children, they were being drafted into the army "because of the need for more troops in northern Uganda and other issues."

"Many of them want to join, because, having been child soldiers early on, there is nothing else to do in those camps."

Army spokesman, Maj Felix Kulayigye yesterday echoed **Coomaraswamy's** concerns saying some parents were telling lies about the ages of their children so that they could be recruited into the Arrow Boys and Amuka militia groups "as way of ensuring their safety."

"But we as UPDF are against the practice of recruiting people under 18 years," Kulayigye said by telephone yesterday.

Coomaraswamy is a Sri Lankan lawyer and Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission.

UPDF Has 5,000 Child Soldiers - UN

by Peter Nyanzi - 20 June 2006

[All Africa](#) – English - (c) 2006 AllAfrica, All Rights Reserved

Kampala, Jun 19, 2006 (The Monitor/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --

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