

Alleged forced recruitment of soldiers especially child conscriptions are based on false information

YANGON, 16 March — The Information Committee of the State Peace and Development Council held the press conference (2/2005) on 15 March 2005. At the press conference matters relating to allegation of using and conscripting child soldiers were clarified by the Director-General U Sit Myaing of Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Following are excerpt of the press statement made by the Director-General:

- Myanmar is a country which treasures its children and the Government is strongly committed to promoting and safeguarding the rights of the children.
- In a report submitted to the UN in February, it included countries that are using children as soldiers in their army. It was highly regrettable that Myanmar was one of the countries which was mentioned in the list.
- Myanmar signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 16 July 1991. To safeguard the rights of the children as mentioned in the UN Convention, the Child Law was promulgated on 14 July 1993.
- Under the directive No 13/73 of the Defence Council dated 8 April 1974, the Tatmadaw (Army, Navy and Air Force) shall recruit persons who are citizens of Myanmar; are between the ages of 18 and 25; are physically sound for military service; and must have prescribed education qualification.
- According to the Directive No. 13/73 of Defence Council, no one under the age of eighteen years is recruited.
- In spite of the regulations on recruitment of soldiers, sometimes some minors were recruited due to inefficiency of recruiting personnel.
- When minors were found they were sent back home immediately. Altogether 213 such persons were sent home—85 in 2002, 75 in 2003, 50 in 2004 and three in February 2005.

- An ILO liaison officer in Myanmar reported fifteen alleged recruitment of minors to authorities concerned and the alleged accusations were investigated and necessary actions were taken.
- In order to prohibit recruitment of minors, the State Peace and Development Council formed the committee for prevention against recruitment of minors on 5 January 2004. The Chairman of the committee is the Secretary-1 of the State Peace and Development Council Lt-Gen Thein Sein and members are the Minister for Home Affairs, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement, the Minister for Labour, the Judge Advocate-General, the Vice-Chief of Armed Forces Training, the Director of Recruitment, the Deputy Chief Justice, the Deputy Attorney-General and the Deputy Director of Directorate of Recruitment as Secretary.
- The committee is carrying out its tasks with the objectives of preventing forced recruitment of minors for military service, safeguarding their interest and ensuring strict observance of the prescribed orders and directives.
- In order to realize the objectives, a working committee consisting of the Minister for Home Affairs, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Labour was formed.
- During their field visits to No. 1 recruitment unit in Yangon and No 2 recruitment unit in Mandalay, UNICEF Resident Representative Ms Carroll C Long and Mr Charles Petrie, the United Nations Resident Coordinator witnessed how young men between the ages of 18 and 25 of their own volition were recruited for military service.
- They were briefed on recruitment system and were informed by authorities with regard to action taken against those who recruited new members without observing the directives issued by the Ministry of Defence.
- The two UN officials had the opportunity to interview three new recruits freely. In the course of their interview, UN official learnt that the three joined the military service on their own volition and had reached the legal age.

- To learn about the issuance of national registration cards which shows the evidence for age, UN Coordinator Mr Charles Petrie and UNICEF Resident Representative Ms Carroll C Long visited Sitpinkwin Village in Thanlyin Township and Myaingthaya model village in Kyauktan Township on 10 March 2005.
- They observed the process of issuing birth / death certificates by the Health Department; birth certificates and death certificates by ward/village-tract peace and development council; enlistment of households on the basis of those certificates, issuance of temporary citizenship cards to those who have reached the age of 10 and issuance of citizenship cards to those who have reached the age of 18.
- In Myanmar only those who have reached the age of 18 are recruited for military service. In recruiting process they must present their citizenship card as evidence .
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Myanmar is party stated that those who are between the age of 15 and 18 can be recruited for military service. In Myanmar, only those who are between the age of 18 and 25 are recruited of their own volition as prescribed in the paragraph 2 (b) of the Directive No 13/73 of the Defence Council.
- In Myanmar, recruitment officials strictly follow the directives of Ministry of Defence with regard to recruiting young man of legal age.
- Therefore, Myanmar strongly and categorically rejects the false accusation targeted to us.

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