United Nations S/2008/409

Security Council

Distr.: General
23 June 2008

Original: English

Additional report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Uganda

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to the request of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for an update on the implementation of the recommendation contained in paragraph 11 of its conclusions (S/AC.51/2007/12) issued pursuant to my report of 7 May 2007 on children and armed conflict in Uganda (S/2007/260). In those conclusions, the Working Group recommended that my Special Envoy for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)-affected areas transmit the message of the Chairman of the Working Group to the head of the LRA delegation to the Juba peace talks.

The report also highlights recent incidents of cross-border recruitment and use of children from the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and southern Sudan by LRA, and makes recommendations.

08-37676 (E) 230608

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to the request of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for an update on the implementation of the recommendation contained in paragraph 11 of its conclusions (S/AC.51/2007/12) issued pursuant to my report of 7 May 2007 on children and armed conflict in Uganda (S/2007/260).

2. In its conclusions, the Working Group requested that my Special Envoy for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)-affected areas, former President of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano, transmit to the head of the LRA delegation to the Juba peace talks the message of the Chairman of the Working Group:

(a) Calling the attention of the head of the LRA delegation to the Juba peace talks to the fact that the Security Council has received my report on children and armed conflict in Uganda (S/2007/260), underlining the absence of any concrete signs regarding the release of children associated with LRA;

(b) Strongly condemning the continuous recruitment and use of child soldiers and all other violations and abuses committed by LRA;

(c) Noting the International Criminal Court indictments against members of the LRA leadership on charges of, among other things, the enlistment of children through abduction, as a war crime;

(d) Strongly reaffirming that the release of children cannot be made dependent upon the conclusion of a peace agreement;

(e) Urging LRA to take immediate steps to release children associated with its forces; to immediately engage in transparent procedures with the United Nations Children's Fund for verification of the demobilization of all children; to provide humanitarian personnel unimpeded access to populations in need; and to ensure that specific provisions for children are included by the parties at all steps of the negotiations, bearing in mind the importance of holding accountable perpetrators of violations and abuses committed against children;

(f) Strongly urging LRA to respond positively to the message and to take serious follow-up actions.

II. Actions taken

3. Pursuant to the above, the Special Envoy for the LRA-affected areas transmitted the message of the Chairman of the Security Council Working Group to the leader of the LRA delegation on 24 August 2007. He was assured that the delegation would convey the message to the leader of LRA, Joseph Kony.

4. However, the LRA delegation had earlier stated that LRA had released all children and women abducted or forcibly conscripted some time ago and that those who remained in the bush were women and children related to LRA members. This information cannot be independently verified because of the absence of any direct contacts between the United Nations and the LRA leadership.

III. Brief update on recruitment and use of children by the Lord's Resistance Army

5. Owing to the apparent absence of LRA from Ugandan territory, there have been no recent cases of recruitment and use of Ugandan children, or other grave violations against children attributable to LRA. However, children and women are still present in the LRA ranks, and there has been no movement on their release.

6. There are reports alleging that LRA has been recruiting children from southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. In one case, three boys from the Sudan and the Central African Republic who escaped from LRA reported that they had been forced to work for LRA as porters. They also reported that girls were present in the ranks, and that they were regularly subjected to gender-based violence, including rape. On 23 April, authorities in Dungu, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, reported that 13 people, including 4 students, were abducted from a primary school following attacks by LRA. Similarly, on 5 June, LRA reportedly attacked a camp of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in Nabanga, southern Sudan, resulting in the killing of at least 21 people, including 6 children, according to Sudanese army officials. Further discussions will be held with the United Nations Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and the Central African Republic, as appropriate, on how best to monitor and report on the grave violations committed against children by LRA, taking into account the regional cross-border dimension of this problem.

7. These allegations are being reported while the peace talks between LRA and the Government of Uganda are stalled, notably because of the refusal by the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, to sign the final peace agreement on 10 April 2008. The agreement on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, signed by the two parties in February 2008 as part of the Juba peace talks, specifically provides that "the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and armed groups is a violation of children's rights". In particular, LRA resolved to "ensure the earliest release and repatriation to Uganda of pregnant and lactating women along with all children under 18 years of age". However, in a communiqué issued on 11 April 2008, Joseph Kony declared all previous peace agreements null and void.

IV. Recommendations

8. The Lord's Resistance Army is strongly urged to provide a complete list of names and ages of the women and children remaining in its ranks for verification and to effect their immediate release.

9. The United Nations Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting in Uganda, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, in close cooperation with the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Nations Mission in the Sudan, are requested to develop a strategy for increased regional joint capability to monitor and report on cross-border recruitment and use of children by the Lord's Resistance Army.