

TMVP should not contest poll: HR group
Jamila Najmuddin, Daily Mirror News – April 17, 2008

An international human rights watchdog has urged the TMVP to step down from contesting in the upcoming Eastern Provincial Council poll as it continues to hold custody of child soldiers.

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, while warning of a crisis looming in Sri Lanka with child recruitment figures increasing, also blamed the Government for jointly contesting with the TMVP in the upcoming polls saying such a move proved that the Government was condoning the TMVP's armed tactics.

"The fact that the Government jointly contested the local government elections in the East with the TMVP - an armed group accused of human rights violations including recruitment of children - is extremely problematic and raises several concerns. Enabling a known armed actor to contest elections legitimizes their role and practices," Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict Director Julia Freedson told the Daily Mirror by e-mail.

Ms. Freedson added that the Government's alliance with the TMVP also limited possibilities of holding perpetrators accountable for violations against children and other civilians.

According to Watchlist, there are many outstanding cases of recruitment of children by both the LTTE and the TMVP that need immediate attention.

"The TMVP has no action plans for release of children in line with international standards. Though UNICEF is reporting that this year there is a decline in child recruitment by both the LTTE and the TMVP, we believe that this may not be reflective of the real situation, as children and families may not report cases of recruitment or re-recruitment due to fear, insecurity and the various forms of threats against them," Ms. Freedson said. The Human Rights Watchdog also reiterated its call for an international monitoring mechanism in the country and has urged the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, which is currently discussing the situation in Sri Lanka, to take immediate steps to exert pressure on the LTTE, the Government and the TMVP to uphold international child protection standards.

This includes sending a delegation to Sri Lanka to review progress and report back and calling for time bound benchmarks for the release of children, the watchdog said.