



## **Liberia dangerous for children months after war ends**

### **Watchlist calls for action by UN Security Council**

**June 28, 2004, New York...** Widespread abuses of Liberian children and adolescents continue, even though war has officially ended, according to a new report by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. The report, *Nothing Left to Lose: The Legacy of Armed Conflict and Liberia's Children*, documents the dangerous reality for children in post war Liberia and calls for immediate action to stop abuses and end impunity for violators of children's security and rights.

"Young people continue to suffer; their hopes for peace and security are being shattered by neglect and failure to provide basic protection," said Julia Freedson, Coordinator of the Watchlist, a network of non-governmental organizations. "As the UN Security Council concludes its visit to West Africa, we call on the Council members and the entire international community to ensure that abuses against Liberian children, such as the rape and sexual exploitation of displaced girls, stop."

Watchlist's report provides Security Council members with evidence and recommendations for implementing their own resolutions on children and armed conflict in the context of Liberia. The report documents the spectrum of violations committed against Liberian children by all parties that participated in armed conflict in 2003, including the government of Liberia under Charles Taylor, and the non-state armed groups LURD and MODEL. These abuses include killing, rape and sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labor, underage recruitment into fighting forces, forced displacement and other violations.

The report also documents serious abuses that continue to plague young people in Liberia. For example, Liberian refugee girls living in neighboring countries and internally displaced girls are regularly exposed to rape and sexual exploitation. Soldiers, men with money, businessmen and humanitarian workers continue to force some girls to trade sex for food or services. Over 15,000 young people were associated with fighting forces from 2000 to 2003, according to estimates, but far fewer youth than expected are going through the nationwide disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) process.

"Various glitches have marred the DDRR process for children and other ex-combatants in Liberia," said Ellen Jorgensen, Acting Executive Director of the Women's Commission for

Refugee Women and Children and a member of the Watchlist who recently visited Liberia. "Mixed messages regarding the qualifying criteria for children to enter the DDRR process have caused confusion and prevented some qualified children from receiving badly needed services, protection and assistance."

Watchlist recommendations for immediate action are directed to all parties that participated in armed conflict, the National Transitional Government of Liberia, the United Nations Security Council, the UN Mission in Liberia, donor governments and agencies and ECOWAS. These recommendations cover a variety of priority actions, including:

1. Make child protection a top priority in post-conflict programs
2. Ensure that all children associated with fighting forces are encouraged to participate in the DDRR process
3. Investigate and follow up on reports of sexual exploitation through a clear mandate and resources for the UN the Mission

A copy of the report is available at [www.watchlist.org](http://www.watchlist.org)

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a network of NGOs dedicated to monitoring and reporting on violations against children in armed Conflict. The Watchlist is managed by a Steering Committee of leaders in child protection including, CARE International, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Save the Children alliance, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and World Vision. Watchlist has worked with other local and international organizations on the preparation of this report