



EMBARGOED UNTIL 11:00AM NEW YORK TIME (EST) MAY 6, 2009

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NO MORE DENIAL:

CALL FOR UN TO PROTECT CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICT IN MYANMAR (BURMA)

May 6, 2009, New York - The UN Security Council should move swiftly to protect the tens of thousands of children in Myanmar who are raped, abducted and recruited as soldiers by the Myanmar armed forces and non-state armed groups, according to Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict's new report released today.

No More Denial: Children Affected by Armed Conflict in Myanmar (Burma), is released this week to mark the first anniversary of the devastating Cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in May 2008 and to draw urgent attention to the plight of children in Myanmar who have been subject to heinous violations of their rights every day since the Cyclone and for decades prior. The release of the 60-page study also coincides with the UN Secretary-General's preparation of his new report on children and armed conflict in Myanmar soon to be delivered to the Security Council.

"Too much time has been wasted denying the extent of the crisis that children in Myanmar's conflict zones are facing. The UN must act now to protect these children and to bring the perpetrators to justice," said Julia Freedson, Director of the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, a global network of non-governmental organizations based in New York. "Now is the time for the Secretary-General to fully document the real situation in Myanmar and for the Security Council to take strong action in response to such atrocities," she said.

No More Denial is the most comprehensive and up-to-date report available on the situation facing children in Myanmar's armed conflict areas. It documents killing and maiming of children, child soldiering, rape, abduction, forced displacement, attacks on schools, denial of humanitarian access and other violations. It also charges the UN Security Council with remaining largely silent despite evidence from UN and local sources of these violations.

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“When I hear the voices of these children, I ask how can anyone deny this reality – these violations are happening right before our own eyes,” said Esther Lay, Programme Director at the Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), an independent local human rights group focusing on Burma. “On behalf of our children and communities, we implore the UN to work with local civil society to help us protect the children and reclaim our people’s future.”

Children as young as nine constantly face the threat of forced recruitment by security forces, non-state armed groups and civilians, even in public places such as bus or train stations and markets. Armed forces have also occupied schools, recruited teachers and students for forced labor and planted landmines close to schools or on the paths to school. Approximately one in five children in the eastern conflict areas dies before reaching the age of five, often due to denial of humanitarian assistance and medical treatment by the Myanmar authorities. This rate is comparable to some the world’s deadliest conflict zones, including Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan.

The Watchlist’s report includes dozens of concrete policy recommendations. Highlights include:

- The UN Security Council should impose targeted measures (sanctions) on the Myanmar government and relevant non-state armed groups if no real progress is achieved in ending the recruitment and use of children within a specified time frame. These may include travel bans, asset freezes or arms embargos.
- The Secretary-General should provide information to the Security Council on all six grave violations called for under SC Resolution 1612, including sexual violence, attacks against schools, denial of humanitarian assistance and others. This should be done by working in close collaboration with local civil society organizations that have access to conflict-affected areas.
- The UN should leverage the support that came in during the cyclone to increase humanitarian access and aid in conflict areas.

Embargoed copies of the full report in English and a summary in Burmese are available upon request.

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