

PRESS RELEASE

More children victims of the conflict, says UNICEF

Colombo, 17 February 2009 – With a growing number of children being recruited by the LTTE and scores of children being killed or injured in fighting, UNICEF today expressed its gravest concerns for children, as Sri Lanka’s conflict enters a new phase.

“We have clear indications that the LTTE has intensified forcible recruitment of civilians and that children as young as 14 years old are now being targeted,” said Mr Philippe Duamelle, UNICEF’s Representative in Sri Lanka. “These children are facing immediate danger and their lives are at great risk. Their recruitment is intolerable.”

From 2003 to the end of 2008, UNICEF has recorded more than 6000 cases of children recruited by the LTTE. “Child soldiers suffer physical abuse, traumatic events and face death. Instead of hope, fear defines their childhood,” said Duamelle.

UNICEF also said it was extremely alarmed at the high number of children being injured in the fighting in the northern area of Sri Lanka known as the Vanni. “Scores of injured children have been evacuated in the past week,” said UNICEF’s Duamelle. “Children are victims of this conflict by being killed, injured, recruited, displaced, separated and denied their every day needs due to the fighting.”

The main injuries to children have been burns, fractures, shrapnel and bullet wounds. UNICEF reiterates the call it has made time and again to Government and the LTTE – civilians, especially children, must be given every protection from the fighting.

UNICEF, together with other UN agencies and partners, is responding to the needs of 30,000 people who have been able to leave the Vanni and are now receiving humanitarian assistance away from the conflict. UNICEF’s emergency support is in water and sanitation, nutrition, protection and education. UNICEF said it is crucial all civilians in the Vanni are able to leave and reach a safe area where they can be urgently assisted.

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