



Lakshman Kadirgamar, P. C., M. P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Sri Lanka

6th October, 1998

Mrs Hilary Rodham Clinton
White House
Washington

Dear Mrs Clinton

You may recall the visit I paid to you at the White House in October last year when I gave you a briefing on the problem of young Tamil children being conscripted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) for the war that they are fighting against the armed forces of the Government of Sri Lanka in the North and East of Sri Lanka. I left with you some photographs, a copy of my speech at the United Nations General Assembly last year and a copy of the Graca Machel report on Children in Armed Conflict.

In May this year the United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative on Children in Armed Conflict, Mr Olara Otunnu, visited Sri Lanka at my invitation and met, among others, representatives of the LTTE who gave him the assurance that they would desist from the practice of using young children in battle. A copy of the communique issued by Mr Otunnu after his visit to Sri Lanka is enclosed herewith.

There is clear evidence that the LTTE have continued that abhorrent practice unabated in the past few months, as they had done over a period of many years. A few days ago 26 Tamil children between the ages of 13 and 18 surrendered to the Sri Lanka Army. A press conference at which these children appeared was held in Colombo yesterday. It was attended by representatives of the independent news agencies and the diplomatic corps based in Colombo. From the statements made by the children at this conference it is clear beyond any possibility of doubt that the LTTE forcibly conscripts children for battle, ill-treats them by depriving them of adequate food and basic sanitary facilities and sends them into battle after giving them cyanide capsules to commit suicide instead of being captured. I am enclosing herewith, for your information, a press release on the conference and reports on it by independent agencies. I will send you more material as soon as I am able to do so.

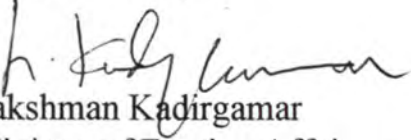
It is time for all those who exert influence in international affairs to speak out against the abominable crimes that the LTTE terrorists are committing against the Tamil children of Sri Lanka. I appeal to you, Mrs Clinton, to use your great international prestige to stop the LTTE from behaving in this barbaric manner. I am writing similar letters to Mrs Cherie Blair, Mrs I K Gujral, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Ms Vasundhara Raje (Minister of State for External Affairs of India), Mrs Graca Mandela and Mr Olara Otunnu, with all of whom I have discussed this problem earlier, urging them to raise their voices on behalf of the children who are being subjected to such cruelty by the LTTE.

I have brought this matter to the attention of a number of Senators and Congressmen and also high officials of the US State Department.

I urge you once more not to remain silent at this time in the face of this horror.

With our best personal regards to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'L. Kadirgamar', written in a cursive style.

Lakshman Kadirgamar
Minister of Foreign Affairs

PRESS RELEASE

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

SRSG-CAC/PR/4

8 May 1998

COMMITMENT BY THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM (LTTE) TO THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT ON PARTICIPATION IN COMBAT AND RECRUITMENT OF CHILDREN

UN HQ NEW YORK - VAVUNYA, SRI LANKA, 8 May 1998

Mr. Olara A. Otunnu, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict is on an official visit to Sri Lanka to witness and assess for himself the multiple ways in which children are affected by the protracted armed conflict in that country. Mr. Otunnu's mandate is to promote the rights, protection and welfare of all children affected by armed conflict.

Mr. Otunnu is currently visiting the Vanni region, one of the most conflict-affected areas of Sri Lanka. Having met with the civilian and military authorities in the northern town of Vavuniya, Mr. Otunnu proceeded to the LTTE-held areas where he saw for himself the conditions of internally displaced communities and heard first-hand accounts of their plight. Mr. Otunnu also held discussions with local government authorities, the Bishop of Mannar, and representatives of local and international organizations about the humanitarian situation in the region, particularly as it affects women and children.

In the context of his humanitarian mission, Mr. Otunnu met with two senior representatives appointed by Mr. V. Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), namely Mr. Thamilselvan, head of the Political Section, and Mr. Balasingham, Political Advisor. Mr. Otunnu raised with the LTTE leadership several issues concerning the protection, rights and welfare of children affected by the ongoing conflict.

Following the discussions with Mr. Otunnu, the LTTE leadership made a number of commitments. They include the following:

1. Participation and recruitment of children

The LTTE leadership, as of today, undertook not to use children below the age of 18 years in combat. They further undertook not to recruit children below the age of 17 years. The LTTE leadership accepted that a framework to monitor these commitments should be put in place.

2. Freedom of movement for displaced populations

The LTTE leadership made the commitment that the movement of displaced populations who want to return to areas now under government control would not be impeded. The LTTE leadership also gave the commitment that there would be no impediment to the return to their homes of Muslim populations. The LTTE leadership accepted that a framework to monitor these processes should be put in place.

3. Distribution of humanitarian supplies

The LTTE leadership made a commitment not to interfere with the distribution of humanitarian supplies destined for affected civilian populations. The LTTE leadership accepted that a framework to monitor this commitment should be put in place.

4. Observing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Mr. Otunnu stressed the importance of all parties including non-state sectors, to observe the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In particular, Mr. Otunnu urged the LTTE leadership to make a public commitment to respect the principles and provisions of the Convention. In this connection, the LTTE leadership indicated its readiness to have its cadres receive information and instruction on the provisions of this Convention.

5. Targeting civilians

Mr. Otunnu expressed the gravest concern about the continuing targeting of civilian populations and sites throughout the country. The LTTE leadership acknowledged this to be an important and legitimate concern and undertook to review its strategies and tactics in this regard.

Mr. Otunnu urges the LTTE to take immediate measures to transform these commitments into action. These would represent significant steps in the efforts to promote the protection, rights and welfare of children affected by the armed conflict in Sri Lanka.

END

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வெளிநாட்டலுவலகம் அமைச்சு, குடியரசுக் கட்டிடம், கொழும்பு 1, இலங்கை

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, Republic Building, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka

NEWS RELEASE

SURRENDERED CHILD SOLDIERS PROVIDE EVIDENCE OF LTTE'S RUTHLESS USE OF CHILDREN IN THE SRI LANKA CONFLICT

The child soldiers who surrendered to the Sri Lankan military authorities last week following the operations presently on in the Vanni jungles, have said they were all "forcibly recruited by the LTTE" and said they "did not bite on the cyanide capsule" because they "didn't want to die" even when they were cornered in the recent battle. Fifteen of the 26 surrendered child soldiers, four of them girls, mostly between the ages of 13-15 years, made these comments when they met with the local and foreign media and representatives from diplomatic missions, on October 7th in Colombo.

The child soldiers, some of them with gun shot wounds, said they had been recruited forcibly from various villages in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Speaking through Tamil interpreters, most of them said they were given training in weapons, which lasted from one month to three months. One of the child soldiers, a 17 year old girl, said, "they (LTTE) asked me to join, I said, I cannot, but they forcibly took me." A 13 year old said, "I cried, not when I was taken by the LTTE, but later when I was alone." The children spoke of handling AK 47, T-56 and 'dash-one' guns during the training while six of them had used guns during the Mankulam battle. They said about 40% of the LTTE cadres who fought in the recent Mankulam battle were about their age. The child soldiers also vouched that they had not fired at anyone to kill during the recent Mankulam battle. The children said they were instructed by the LTTE leadership to go forward and open fire, and when they looked back, they saw their own cadres running away from the battlefield. One 14 year old child soldier said, "We saw them running and one of our leaders shot three injured LTTE cadres before running away. We knew then that we were trapped. The choice was either to return to the LTTE or surrender to the army. We decided to surrender to the army which was a better choice".

The children also pointed out that most of the LTTE cadres involved in the Mankulam battle were children. One 15 year old boy said, "there were about 157 children about my age who were trained with me". The children admitted they were wearing cyanide capsules at the time of surrender and said they did not take the cyanide as they did not want to die. They said on surrendering, the military authorities removed the cyanide capsules from them. The children said they were provided with only one set of clothing by the LTTE for many months. They further said they did not have proper medical facilities or proper food once their training was over, while the girls said they did not even have proper facilities to bathe. All the children present wanted to return to their parents, but many

were terrified of returning to their home towns in the north, as they fear the LTTE would hunt them and kill them. They all hope to return to school, and some wanted to go for higher education and take up careers in medicine and teaching.

The children also said they are being treated well by the military authorities than they were by the LTTE. A 13 year old boy said that when they surrendered to the army they were initially afraid. He said, "There was heavy firing and we waited in the bunkers until the firing ceased. At about six in the morning, we dropped our weapons and with our hands raised up shouted as we came out of the bunkers. Some of the army officers spoke Tamil, and we told them we wanted to surrender. They took us to meet one of their officers who asked us to take off the cyanide capsules and the LTTE uniforms" He also said, "we were given proper clothes after many months. We had also not eaten for almost one and a half days and they gave us food and water and were kind to us. All our injured friends were immediately given treatment. Some of them are still in hospital". Another 14 year old girl, showing her injured arm said, "the people we were trained to fight against are very good to us,". A 15 year old, on being asked what he was taught to do when they saw an injured soldier belonging to the security forces said, "even if we want to help them, we were taught to kill them and move forward."

When they were asked about LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, they said he had begun an "unwanted war". On answering a question on what he thought of the war, a 16 year old boy said they had been told by the LTTE that they were fighting for a separate state for the Tamils, a view he completely rejected and said he wants peace and harmony in the country. The children unanimously stated that they wanted a "peaceful settlement" where everyone could be "united".

Military Spokesman, Brigadier Sunil Tennekoon observed that, "this is the first time such a large batch of LTTE members have surrendered together". He said the children will be sent for rehabilitation, based on what they wanted to do. He also said, "we will talk to the children individually and based on their needs and preferences, they will be sent for appropriate rehabilitation".

The children also interacted with representatives from many Colombo based diplomatic missions, who inquired from them of their welfare and their life with the LTTE.

Colombo,
7th October 1998

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Thursday, October 08, 1998

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Drawn young, they know not what war is

Date: 08-10-1998 :: Pg: 14 :: Col: d

By V.S.Sambandan

COLOMBO, Oct. 7.

In a couple of days they were transformed from 'little warriors' and were added to the list of those "surrendered". Even during their days of combat, they did not know much of what they were fighting for.



"Look, little Tigers!" blurted a passer-by, pointing to the van which ferried them to the high-security zone. Ranging from 13 to 18 years of age, 10 boys and 4 girls were placed under the spotlight today and within seconds the media was all over them.

Paraded by the Sri Lankan defence establishment in front of the media and diplomatic corps, these children were 14 of the 27 young ones deployed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at Mankulam and who surrendered to the Sri Lankan Army last week. From the risky battlefield in the jungles to the high-security zone in the capital, it was a long ride for them.

A couple of boys answered cheerfully, the rest had to be drawn out and at the end of the hour, two girls broke into tears. One of the boys clearly did not like what was going on - the camera lights, incessant questions and glare of publicity. "I am not interested in anything. For me life has lost all meaning after my father died."

Mostly drawn from displaced families, their common mode of entry, they said, was through the 'propaganda of the LTTE.' "I had gone to buy some books, on the way back, I saw the LTTE propaganda meeting out of curiosity. I returned home. As someone from the family had to join the movement, I did," reasoned a 14-year-old girl. Her sparkling bright eyes concealed a forgotten childhood. The most-educated among the lot had completed her 'A'-level.

For all of them, Mankulam was their first battle. They said that they were trained over a period of one to three months to use AK 47s, T56s and lob grenades, but when asked if any of them have shot anyone dead, the answer was "No." None of them had seen any of their top-rung leaders, the Black Tigers or their Supreme Commander. None of them had ever known a Sinhalese. Their memories are clouded to recall any of their pre-movement friends. But, yes, some of them made, and subsequently lost, comrades after they joined the movement.

While the more vocal verdict on their reading of the conflict was that it was "unnecessary", a quieter, and more reflective opinion was, "I don't know if it is justified or not. I am not in a position to say as yet. It is too early."

Asked why they did not bite the cyanide capsules, one said, "I threw it away and surrendered to the army." "I would have bit it as the pain from a bullet injury was unbearable," interrupted another, "but the army snatched it away." "I wanted to live," was yet another matter-of-fact retort. The injured among them have been shifted to Pudukudiyiruppu for treatment. They said they were under orders to shoot dead injured soldiers. "If we do not, those who come behind us will kill the soldiers."

The boys constituted a platoon at Mankulam and the girls were among 20 others who were



Books

deployed at the same battle, mostly in the forward bunker lines. Most of the 100-odd killed, according to them, were kids used for odd jobs. Stuck in a bunker for a day and a half, "we had no food, many of us were injured and we decided to surrender." The 'leader' of the group was not brought to the briefing in view of 'security risk'.

Of his future, a 14-year-old said. "All I want to do is to study and live a free life with my parents." Though all wanted to get back to their families, the general feeling among them is that they have no future in their homesteads as they would be killed if they returned. "Some may think we are dead," hopes another 14-year-old.

One of the most photographed faces today was that of a 13-year-old. As his father was employed abroad, he was living with his mother. Soon, his house became a den for drunkards and the frustrated mother consumed poison and ended her life. His life shifted to Vanni under the care of his grandmother. Then, one day "I was taken away during lunch break and I have not seen my father since then. I cried, but I was not allowed to go back and was told that I would never see him again." Though he would have liked to use a firearm, he never got the chance as his job was to lob a grenade or two.

Like him, most children said they were used to "do all sorts of work," but they would have to stand up and fight, "if it came to that."

But, when such a situation arose at Mankulam, "we surrendered."

PTI reports:

The Sri Lankan Army today claimed that 20 LTTE rebels were killed in encounters in different places in the north and east during the past two days.

Eighteen rebels were killed and 12 others wounded when troops fired at a group of LTTE men near northern Mankulam town which was captured by the Army on Sept. 30, a Defence Ministry press release said.

Two more rebels were killed in Army ambushes in the eastern Trincomalee district.

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Full story

Sri Lanka shows rebel child soldiers to media

09:46 a.m. Oct 07, 1998 Eastern

By Dexter Cruetz

COLOMBO, Oct 7 (Reuters) - Sri Lanka's military on Wednesday produced 15 Tamil Tiger child soldiers, four of them girls, who said they gave up to the army after fighting last week in the north.

"We put down our weapons and came forward with our hands raised, but the soldiers did not hear us because of the gunfire," said 17-year-old female rebel who identified herself as Rasamani.

"We went back to our bunkers and the next day we came forward again. This time a soldier heard us," she said in Tamil.

Sri Lanka's military presented before the media 15 of the 26 Tamil Tiger child rebels who had surrendered during the capture of Mankulam, a key northern town on a highway the army has been trying to wrest control of since last year.

The rebels were between 13 and 18 years of age.

They told reporters they had decided to surrender when Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels holding positions ahead of them were killed and those behind them ran away during the fighting.

The rebels, some of them with gunshot wounds, said they had been recruited forcibly from various villages in the north and east of Sri Lanka, trained to handle weapons and sent to Mankulam during the past three months.

"I cried, not when I was taken by the LTTE but later when I was alone," said a 13-year-old rebel who said his name was Vipulanathan.

"They (rebels) asked me to join, I said, I cannot, but they forcibly took me," said Rasamani.

"I don't like to die," said Thangarajah Yoghan, a 14-year-old rebel, when asked why did not he bite the trademark cyanide capsule that all LTTE rebels carry around their necks.

Military officials said they had removed the cyanide capsules from the necks of all the children after they surrendered.

Olara Otunnu, the United Nations secretary-general's special representative on Children and Armed Conflict, visited Sri Lanka in May and obtained an assurance from the LTTE that they would not enlist child soldiers in their war against government troops.

The government has long accused the LTTE of using children in its

campaign for a separate homeland for minority Tamils in the country's north and east that began in 1983.

"This is the first time such a large batch of LTTE members has surrendered together," said military spokesman Brigadier Sunil Tennakoon, adding that they would go through a process of rehabilitation before being released.

Government troops captured Mankulam last week soon after they lost another northern town to the rebels.

Savage fighting was reported after the rebels attacked the military's defences in Kilinochchi, forcing the troops to vacate the town. Kilinochchi lies just south of the northern Jaffna peninsula, while Mankulam is further south.

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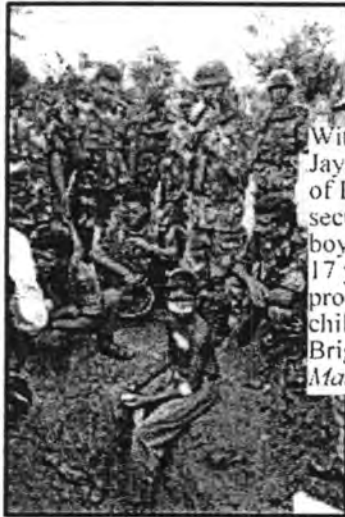
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Today's Top Story

Don't be misled by LTTE's killer-leaders - surrenders

LTTE cadres who surrendered to the forces at Mankulam, have requested their colleagues not to be further misled by the killer-leaders of the organisation. In the midst of attacks by Jayasikuru troops, key Tiger leaders, such as Nakkiran and Jeyam had fled. No faith can be placed on them, therefore the cadres, who are in the custody of the Government troops, are appealing to the other members to surrender soon, through Red Cross Offices in their areas.



With the fall of Mankulam to Jayasikuru troops, a large number of LTTE cadres surrendered to the security forces. Most of them were boys and girls aged between 11 and 17 years. Here Government troops providing medical aid to an injured child soldier from the LTTE's 'Baby Brigade.' *Picture by Sudath Maluweera*

A large number of LTTE cadres were injured in the Mankulam attack. A majority of them were executed by the killer Tiger leader Nakkiran.

Thavaselvam alias Kurunpimannan who surrendered, told our special correspondent that he saw with his own eyes how they were killed. He said when many LTTE cadres were injured in Mankulam, the leader Jeyam fled, under the guise of bringing in more fighters.

Jegadishwari alias Maradarshi LTTE member from Shiva Nagar in Kilinochchi surrendered at Mankulam. She said the LTTE denied her, of parents, relatives and also her pleasant childhood. Many children like her were undergoing various difficulties in LTTE camps. She disclosed that several of them were waiting for an opportunity to flee the camps.

Vinodhani alias Malar is another member of the LTTE, who has surrendered. She said ten of her colleagues were killed in the Mankulam attack. She also said that she took part in attacks against the Sathjaya Operation and on the Mullaitivu Army Camp.

Gunasingham Bojita alias Pudaneri is a 13-year-old girl, who had surrendered. Her only aspiration is to see her parents. She said that other children who are in LTTE camps are hoping to surrender to the security forces. She also said that the LTTE did not grant them an opportunity to know that military officials were so kind.

The LTTE was still forcing them to consider soldiers as the main enemies of the Tamil people.



Three government troopers hold up a torn canvas painting of "Joti", a deceased LTTE leader, which they found after capturing a terrorist fortification in Mankulam last week.

Picture by Sudath Maluweera

Front Page

Produced by Lake House in collaboration with Lanka Internet Services Ltd

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LTTE promise broken

All teenage surrenderees admit receiving weapons training

by Sumadhu Weerawarne

All of the teenage LTTE cadre who surrendered to the Sri Lankan army at Mankulam said that they had received weapons training, breaking the promise given by the LTTE to the UN Special Representative Olara Otunnu earlier this year. One of the surrenderees was

as young as 13 years. Fourteen of the 18 teenagers who surrendered were present at a press conference, which was also attended by international NGOs and foreign diplomats. They looked shell shocked at the beginning, but turned out to be articulate during the course of the press conference.

The teenagers who appeared before the press said that they too had been given cyanide capsules to use if they ever faced capture. "But we chose not to swallow them, because we wanted to live" said one who looked 15 years of age. Most gave their ages as 15 and 17. Only one of children said that he had seen Sinhalese people before. But that was when he was only 3 years old. The rest said that they had never seen Sinhalese civilians.

One boy who was 15 years old said he had received 1 1/2 months of combat training in the Batticaloa district. 175 others had been trained along with him. When he was asked why he joined, he said, "I joined them without

Contd. on Page 3

knowing what I would be getting into. Now I regret it." When asked why he surrendered, he said "There were 60 of us at Mankulam. Some were injured and others ran away. So we surrendered." Most who were asked whether they had fired and killed in the battle maintained that they had fired but had not killed anyone. Some said that they had not fired at all. The 13 year old said he was in the "supplies division."

Another boy, who was 16 years old, and was born in Hatton and whose family moved to the north when he was 3, said that he had joined the LTTE in November 1997. "Two men had come searching for a boy who had run away from the LTTE. The boy was next door. But they made a mistake in the address, assaulted me and took me away. I was given 2 months arms training at Mallavi." When asked what he thought about the war, he said "We were told we were fighting for a country of our own. I reject that idea totally. People must live in peace and harmony. If I go home they will kill me."

A 16 year old boy who was from Ampara said that he had three sisters and was the only boy in his family. He had joined the LTTE in March of this year. After 1 1/2 months of training in firing 60 mm mortars in Batticaloa he had been taken to Ambagannan where he was assigned to do "bunker duty" in a forward line. He escaped to Vadakatchchi and returned to his home.

"But my neighbours informed the LTTE. I was taken back and sent to Mankulam."

A 17 year old girl said that when she was at Mallavi in November 1997 to buy some schoolbooks she had been given some LTTE propaganda, and had enlisted the very next day. However, she later said that she had been forced to join the LTTE. She was one of 150 girls who were trained in Mullaitivu. They had been trained from 6-8:30, 10-12 and 3-5 everyday for a few months. She was then assigned to do "defence duty" at Mundumurippu.

Asked what her ambition had been when at school, she said "I wanted to be a doctor." When asked what she would like to do now, she said "I want to go back home to Mallavi, and go to school." When asked why she surrendered, she said "Those in front and behind had been killed. There was no alternative." When asked why she did not swallow the cyanide capsule, she said, "I do not want to die."

When asked what they did to Sri Lankan soldiers who were injured in battle, a boy replied and said, "We were ordered to kill soldiers and go forward. If we did not kill them, our leaders behind would kill them." When asked what they did with the LTTE cadres who were injured, he said, "I saw Jeyam kill three of our own people." Asked what his parents felt about his joining the LTTE, he said "All parents like to look after their chil-

dren." Asked what he thought of Prabhakaran, he said "I have never seen him. But he has started this unwanted war." He had been in Mankulam since the 15th of last month. "During the past 10 months, most of those stationed at Mankulam were young people. There were 40 boys and 20 girls with me."

A 16 year old boy asked us whether he would be sent home, said that "I cannot think anything of the Sinhalese because I do not know them." He had joined the LTTE in 1995 having studied up to the seventh grade in school. He said that he had not been forced to join the LTTE. "I had a sister who died of a snake bite, and my father died in 1997 of a heart attack. Because my mother was alone, I was allowed to go home. I re-joined the LTTE the next year and my mother became a beggar." When asked what he wanted, he said "I want to go home to see my mother." Asked what he thought of the war, he said "The

LTTE says it is fighting for Eelam. The government says it is fighting for all the people. Children are dying. They should talk. I joined with three friends. They are all dead." Asked what he thought of Prabhakaran, he said "I have heard my friends say that Prabhakaran is a god. But I do not know." Asked what the LTTE did to those who desert, he said that they assault them and put them to the front lines.

The youngest, who was 13 years of age, said that he had been conscripted while he was staying with his grandmother in Mulliyavallai where he was studying. He said he was taken to the LTTE camp there. "When my grandmother came in search of me, the LTTE used to hide me and ask my grandmother to identify her grandson among the remaining inmates. She never found me, because I was never there." He said that the battle for

Mankulam was his first battle. He also said he knew how to use a gun even though he was in the supplies division.

An 18 year old girl from Puliyankulam who joined the LTTE in 1996 said that she did not know what had happened to her family.

She had studied to the tenth grade. She said that in school her favourite subjects had been Tamil and Science, and if she had studied, she would have become a doctor. "In the LTTE I sewed clothes. But I also know how to use a weapon. I have fired." When asked what she wanted to do now, she said "The army has said I can study. I do not want to go back to Jaffna. Colombo is good." She also said that though she like to watch movies, the last one she saw was four years ago. "They should stop the war and live in peace," she said.

The Statesman

DELHI THURSDAY 8 OCTOBER 1998

Innocence on trial in Lanka

RAVIR PRASAD

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

COLOMBO, Oct. 7. — Even as the U N today expressed disappointment over the deployment of child soldiers by the Tamil Tiger militants, the Sri Lankan Defence Ministry exhibited some of them before the international media and diplomats in its bid to discredit the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the international community.

The military authorities presented before a select gathering of foreign journalists and western diplomats 15 LTTE child soldiers, including four girls, who had reportedly surrendered to the armed forces when they captured Mankulam on 30 September. Today's move was intended at scoring a propaganda victory over the LTTE.

Answering questions posed by reporters and diplomats, the children said that they had been deployed at Mankulam to fight the Lankan armed forces but they decided to give up when troops marched in. They said that they had been treated well by the forces after their surrender.

The youngest of them was a 13-year-boy from the northern Wanni mainland, who had been whisked away by the Tigers from his school. He said that the LTTE had deployed him in the supply unit and that he had never fired a weapon. "I was trained to use only hand grenades, they never taught me how to use a rifle," he said.

The other children said that they had been trained in jungle warfare and had fired rifles. "None of us has ever killed anyone. We were deployed at Mankulam, but when we found the army advancing towards us we surrendered," a 17-year-old girl said adding: "Our leader told us to surrender. He too surrendered with us."

The Ministry of Defence had invited the western diplomats to establish that the rebels had indeed deployed child soldiers, violating international laws and their assurance to the U N secretary-general's special envoy on Children and Armed Conflict, Mr Olara Otunnu. The LTTE leadership had assured Mr Otunnu some months ago that they would not deploy any person below the age of 18 in combat and that they would not recruit children above 17 years of age.

Mr Otunnu has reportedly expressed his disappointment over the reported deployment of child soldiers by the LTTE. The Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation today reported that the U N special envoy told the Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, Prof G L Peiris, in New York that he was disappointed with the LTTE as the rebels had not kept their promise.

20 killed: More than 20 LTTE rebels were killed in the north and east of Sri Lanka as reports of fresh fighting came in from the northern Wanni mainland. The Ministry of Defence said in a statement today that 18 Tamil militants had been killed and 13 were wounded in a confrontation north of Mankulam.

Most of the LTTE fighters are kids, say Tiger captives

From P. K. Balachandran

COLOMBO, Oct. 3

Seventy-five per cent of the LTTE's fighters are children, according to the 23 young cadres of the guerrilla group captured by the Sri Lankan army at Mankulam last Wednesday.

Seen at the Anuradhapura base hospital by a party of visiting newsmen, seven of them were 15 and eleven were between 16 and 20. The five girls in the group were within 19.

"We were abducted by the LTTE and forcibly thrown into battle", the kids were quoted as saying by the Tamil paper "Thina-karan".

They also said that many children wanted to surrender to the army, but could not.

"We did not know what we were fighting for. We were to keep killing without expecting any returns," they said. They blamed the LTTE for ruining their lives.

In August last year, the Overall Force Commander of Operation Jayasikurui, Maj. Gen. Asoka Jayawardene, told "The Island" that because of increasing casualties, the LTTE was forced to recruit more and more children. Reporters who were taken to

Periyamadu at about this time were told by officers that most of the fighters they encountered were between 13 and 15 years of age.

The Sri Lankan army has christened the kids in the LTTE strike force as the "Baby brigade". They are generally used in suicide missions, which form the first thrust of a typical LTTE attack, officers say.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, had told the United Nations repeatedly that the LTTE was inducting kids into combat. This was because they could be easily indoctrinated. The fact that children were highly impressionable was exploited to the hilt, he said.

When Jaffna was under the control of the LTTE between 1990 and 1995, recruiting parties used to go to schools, show exciting videos of battles and give thundering lectures on the virtues of joining the LTTE. To prevent their impressionable children from signing up, parents used to wait at the gates of schools to whisk their kids away before the LTTE got them.

In August 1997, the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, had appointed the Ugandan diplomat, Olara Otunnu as Special Representative to study the impact of armed conflicts on children.



Olara Otunnu



Prof. G. L. Peiris

Use of child soldiers Otunnu disappointed over LTTE breach of assurance

United Nations Secretary-General's Special representative for Children and Armed conflict Olara Otunnu, at a meeting in New York with Justice, Constitutional Affairs, Ethnic Affairs and National Integration Minister and Deputy Finance Minister Prof. G. L. Peiris has indicated disappointment at the breach by the LTTE of specific assurances given to him that children would not be recruited into the cadres of the LTTE before the age of 17 and they would not be deployed in combat until the age of 18.

United Nations personnel were briefed in detail about current initiatives of the Government with

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regard to power sharing, rehabilitation, human rights and related matters at the UN headquarters in New York on Monday by Prof. Peiris.

Among others present were Mr. Nitin Desai, Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Hans Corell, Legal Counsel and Under Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, Mr. Vieira Sergio de Mello, Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Rafeeddin Ahmed, Under Secretary-General and Associate Administrator of the UNDP, Mr. Kieran Prendergast, Under Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Professor Ruth Wedgewood, Professor of Law of Yale University, Mr. Thalif Deen, UN Correspondent and Mr. Ted Morello of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

The meeting was hosted by Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under Secretary-General for

Disarmament Affairs. The deep commitment of the Sri Lanka Government to the constitutional process and to the devolution of power as the key to resolving the island's ethnic conflict drew warm praise from officials representing all sectors of the United Nations system in New York on Monday.

The gathering observed that they found particularly useful the comprehensive information put at their disposal with regard to the work of the Parliamentary Select Committee over a period of more than two years and the extensive devolution of authority to the regions contemplated in the draft new Constitution.

Prof. Peiris explained to the UN officials that the Government, in its sustained attempts to fulfil the two-thirds majority requirement in Parliament, had repeatedly offered to accommodate any alternative proposals made by the Opposition, provid-

ed that these changes were acceptable to the minority parties.

Officials representing the higher echelons of the UN system said that they found totally convincing the emphatic appeal made by President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, in her address to the General Assembly two weeks ago, for concerted global action against terrorism, against the backdrop of her Government's unwavering strategy directed towards the political empowerment of minority communities.

The extensive rehabilitation work undertaken by the Government in the areas affected by the war—especially with regard to the restoration of electricity, the revival of the courts system, fisheries, agriculture, education and health—was brought to the notice of the UN system by Prof. Peiris at this meeting.