



NEPAL'S CHILDREN DEVASTATED BY RAGING ARMED CONFLICT

CALL FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

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January 26, 2005, Kathmandu and New York - The raging armed conflict in Nepal is devastating the nation's young people, who are being killed, maimed and subjected to many other violations of their security and rights, according to a new report by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. The report, *Caught in the Middle: Mounting Violations Against Children in Nepal's Armed Conflict*, documents the dangerous reality for children in Nepal, which has been deteriorating since the end of the cease-fire in 2003 and calls for immediate action to stop these abuses and an end to impunity enjoyed by those who commit them.

“Children’s lives are not being spared – not by the Maoists and not by the government armed forces,” said Julia Freedson, Director of the Watchlist, a network of non-governmental organizations based in New York. “In so many instances, Nepal’s children are getting caught in the cross-fire, and even worse, they are being deliberately used and exploited by those who are waging this war.”

Watchlist calls for immediate action to stop the spectrum of violations against children in the context of armed conflict, including killing, maiming, torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, attacks on schools, abduction, trafficking, forced labor, underage recruitment into fighting forces, forced displacement, death and injury from landmines, and others.

“First and foremost, the government and the Maoists must take immediate steps to halt violations against children,” said Kathleen Hunt, CARE International’s UN Representative and Chairperson of the Watchlist. “They must uphold international human rights and humanitarian laws, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child.”

“There is no time to waste. The UN Security Council will take up its annual review of the appalling conditions for children and armed conflict next month. It must act now---along with other high-level members of the international community---to provide the essential resources and potential remedies necessary to protect Nepal’s children before their precarious situation deteriorates any further,” Hunt said.

Watchlist’s report, released today at an event attended by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, in Kathmandu, Nepal (Shanker Hotel, Lazimpat, Kathmandu), presents the most comprehensive assessment to date on the situation of children caught in armed conflict in Nepal. It provides the international community, and particularly the UN Security Council, with detailed evidence of abuses being committed against children by both parties to the armed conflict.

Caught in the Middle includes evidence gathered by a wide network of child protection groups in Nepal, and documents alarming patterns of children being systematically denied their rights, such as the right to education as a result of the Maoists’ strikes (*bandhs*), destruction of schools, school closures and overcrowding and the pervasive atmosphere of fear and violence. The Watchlist network has documented several cases of Maoists targeting schools for attacks and using schools as grounds for abduction and recruitment of tens of thousands of students and teachers. One of the worst examples of this basic breach of children’s rights is a gunfight between government armed forces and Maoists at the Shree Sharada Higher Secondary School in Doti district in October 2003, during which government armed forces killed four students.

“Children want to see more books, not bullets; more benches, not bunkers and are in need of additional caring trained teachers, who will not be taken away from the school,” said Udaya Manandhar, Save the Children U.S. Program Director in Nepal.

Watchlist’s report makes urgent recommendations to the government of Nepal, the Maoists, the UN Security Council, UN country team and humanitarian community in Nepal and to donors to take immediate action to protect Nepali children and adolescents from any further abuses.

A copy of the report is available at 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.