

**North East Secretariat on Human Rights Responds on
Human Rights Watch Report 'Living in Fear'**

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[courtesy TamilNation.org]

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This response is dedicated to Mr. A. Chandra Nehru, a fearless defender of human rights.

We would like right at the start to commend and thank [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) for submitting such a long and detailed report, Living in Fear, in November, 2004 on an issue of utmost concern to the children of the NorthEast of Sri Lanka. We know that this is only one of a long series of reports on the topic in various countries that HRW has written and not a real focus on Sri Lanka in particular, yet Human Rights Watch took considerable time and effort to not to mention risk to research for this report over two weeks in August, 2004. We would like to express our gratitude to all those who worked on the report for their efforts.

We would also like, right at the very start, to firmly assert that NESOHR supports international law. NESOHR sees as its mission to encourage the upholding and enforcement of these laws for the human rights of the people of the NorthEast of Sri Lanka. We will work:

- 1.) to empower the people with knowledge about their rights so that they can stand up for themselves,
- 2.) to assist the people in bringing complaints of abuse to those in authority and
- 3.) to bring the reports of the abuse of the human rights of the Tamil people to those in authority locally and on an international level.

We take as our mission ALL the human rights of our people. We feel it necessary, therefore, to respond to HRW's report in 4 areas in which it presents serious weaknesses.

- 1.) The selective application of international human rights norms. The report would have been significantly stronger and more relevant if it had focused on a broader set of abuses against children.
- 2.) The report exhibits a pro-government and anti-LTTE bias which we consider most unfortunate and unnecessary. In a genocidal situation, international law obliges the international community to intervene on behalf of the people under threat.
- 3.) The report contains certain factual problems.
- 4.) The report sets itself up to be ineffective in its mission of eliminating the use of child soldiers. Because of the report's partisan bias, which alienates the LTTE and the Tamil people and because the report is addressed to the international community primarily, which has little leverage, either moral, financial or military, the report will have little direct impact on the problem.

Selective Application of Human Rights Norms

The Geneva Conventions (Common Article Three) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child both lay out laws and norms to be followed during war, whether external or internal. These laws are to protect the civilian population from those with military might. Sri Lanka has seen 20 years of war concentrated in the NorthEast, the homeland of the Tamils. [International laws about the protection of the civilian population have been flagrantly violated during the war](#), resulting in:

- 1.) the direct killing of 80,000 or more civilians out of a population of 3 million, 95% of which are attributable to government attacks, and the indirect deaths of many more,
- 2.) the impoverishment of the population,
- 3.) the destruction of not only their economy and infrastructure, but also their institutions and culture,
- 4.) the displacement of almost the entire population at one time or another and the permanent displacement of one third, and
- 5.) approximately 50,000 children killed in the war, thousands of orphans, disabled children, and widows, and a dramatic increase in infant mortality. In 1980 almost all children attended school, while today only 50 % do.
- 6.) widespread disappearances, massacres, torture and extended detention without trial practiced by the state against significant numbers of the population.

Amnesty International recently recognized that the enforcement of international laws is not protecting women and children in war. In Sri Lanka this is very obvious. This destruction of a such a significant segment of the population by the state, along with the people's culture and economy, amounts to genocide against the Tamil population. Just because this program of destruction of the community by its so-called government has not been declared genocide by international organizations does not eliminate the facts. A pro-state bias amongst international institutions and a blockade have meant very little outcry heard about this assault on a people and their foundations. There has been even less protective action taken.

A. Human rights reporting

Human rights organizations have a legitimate role to play in the quest for human dignity and freedom. Their relentless effort to expose atrocities committed in conflict zones is critical to keep the abuses under the scrutiny of the world. The dilemma these organizations face is the necessity of funding their existence while exposing abuses without bias. In the present global structure the way nations are organized and controlled, there is no logical solution to break out of the mentioned dilemma. There is a lingering suspicion among victimized populations with few channels to air their grievances that there is always a hidden agenda ☐ driven by donor nations or actors ☐ behind the facade of human rights protection these organizations provide. At the very least, in Sri Lanka, there has been the sin of omission with regard to the Tamil situation.

In the beginning of the conflict, when the Tamils were completely helpless and regional powers sought benefit to themselves for championing the Tamil cause, some abuses were highlighted in international fora, but once this state backing ended, the conflict's devastation of the Tamil population fell off the international radar screen.

With the growth of the ability of the Tamils in the NorthEast to defend themselves against the depredations of the state, other governments began to take notice and be concerned that this self-defense might serve as an example for their own restive populations. At this stage the Tamils and their armed movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is heading their struggle for the [right to self-determination](#), began to be vilified with the worst pejorative of the current era – ‘terrorist.’

The chief independent protectors of human rights in an international context, Amnesty International and HRW, have done little in comparison to the magnitude of the problem, probably because no big power interests seem involved and they have little clout by themselves.

Amnesty highlighted disappearances and torture vigorously in the 1980s and early 1990s, but acquiesced in the Government of Sri Lanka’s (GOSL) tactic of isolating the Tamil areas from outside observation and interaction through travel prohibitions and an economic embargo - a war crime in itself. The organization was satisfied to ‘engage’ the Tamils and the LTTE from Colombo, which meant using Sinhalese and anti-LTTE sources of information and virtually ignoring issues of importance to the people of the NorthEast, such as bombing and shelling of population centers, ethnic cleansing and crop destruction. Would ‘engaging’ southern Sudan from Khartoum have ever been deemed feasible or acceptable?

Amnesty did respond effectively to the mass disappearances of Tamils after the GOSL invasion of Jaffna in 1995/6 and has made periodic protests about the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and individual cases of torture and disappearance.

Throughout the entire conflict HRW has had no budget to cover Sri Lanka and has had no staff person designated to follow events on the island. One staff person monitored human rights there until the late 1990s out of her own interest and concern and assisted in setting up the Sri Lankan Human Rights Commission, but had little time or budget to do her own investigations. Her one attempt at an investigation ‘of forced child labor by the GOSL’s armed forces in the East’ was never published. Since this staff member left, there has been nobody with any expertise on Sri Lanka at HRW. Over the years HRW’s reports usually included 1-2 pages on Sri Lanka out of 400 page reports on international human rights abuses.

When HRW does attempt to cover events in Sri Lanka, they must rely on Sri Lankan NGOs and those they contact first are in the capitol of Colombo and disconnected from the conflict zone and its people. In countries in which the big powers do not approve of the government this would be inconceivable. Imagine attempting to learn about Tibet by working through NGOs in Beijing! Some effort has been made to work with Tamil NGOs functioning from Colombo, without realizing that those able to work in Colombo have been severely compromised by their need for a relationship with the GOSL.

James Ross, Esq., one of the contributors to HRW’s report, recently wrote a piece in The New Republic, for instance, praising Anandasangaree of the TULF during a relatively fair election in which he won a grand total of 3,000 votes. The article demonstrated how out of touch HRW was with the details on the ground in the island.

The observation in a Jan. 2005 press release by HRW that nearly 2,000 LTTE cadres have been killed in the Tsunami, a number for which no source is given and which is not generally given credence in Sri Lankan circles, raises serious question about the motivation of the HRW.

Minor NGOs have brought up the Sri Lankan issue at the UN Human Rights Commission every year and occasionally the UN has sent a Special Rapporteur to cover specific issues. Bacre N'Diaye wrote an excellent report on extra-judicial executions in 1996.

Sri Lanka has never been on the Security Council agenda. We believe that the mention of the child soldier issue in the Secretary General's report is the first time the conflict has been brought before this body after 20 years of war.

B. Why now?

The HRW report on child soldiers is the first full-length report on a human rights issue on Tamil concerns since Bacre N'Diaye's in 1996. It is also the first since the LTTE was designated a 'terrorist' organization by the US and since the LTTE moved from being primarily a guerrilla force to a regular army.

With the long-term neglect of issues to do with the human rights of Tamils on the international agenda, it is appropriate to ask, "Why now?" and "Why this issue?" One can only answer that there is a wider international agenda behind the spotlight on child soldiers in Sri Lanka that has little to do with the needs of the island. This international agenda, coincidentally or not, meshes well with the impulses of the GOSL under Pres. Kumaratunge.

The issue chosen for such in-depth treatment has been, and will presumably be again, used extensively by the GOSL to attempt to undercut the moral foundations of the Tamil struggle in the eyes of the Tamil and Sinhalese populations and the international community. As Tisaranee Gunasekera, a Sinhalese nationalist, in her article about international efforts to marginalize the LTTE in the US-based Lanka Academic website says, "This is also the ideal time to carry out a propaganda campaign in the US and in Europe about child conscription by the LTTE" (9/12/04)

Some of the impulse behind both the GOSL and the international community choosing the Optional Protocol as the one children's issue to focus on has to do with its military dimensions. It is not an accident that the lack of sympathy for non-state actors (NSA) meshes with demands to inspect their military camps to assure that they contain no child soldiers. (see the HRW report p.9)

C. Action Plan

As part of the peace process, an Action Plan has been set up to address the needs of the children of the NorthEast. According to UNICEF, in the first six months of 2004, 7,000 children had re-enrolled in school, more than 43,000 children received catch-up-education classes, 24 school buildings were repaired or reconstructed, 580 child soldiers and their families received social work assessments and 410 children engaged in hazardous labor or living in the streets received assistance. (9/9/04 press release)

This kind of integrated program for the betterment of children throughout the NorthEast receives NESOHR's whole-hearted endorsement. Any party who does not hold up their part of the obligations should be censured. Perhaps the LTTE is not doing all it could do for children, yet neither is the government working hard enough to provide the health care and nutrition necessary to decrease infant mortality.

D. Alternatives

As a theoretical aside, NESOHR would like to note that the Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for children to be able to participate in affairs which affect them and to have a voice that can be heard in the wider world. It seems that this requirement is meant only for peaceful, wealthy and free countries. In situations of oppression and war, children are expected to be passive objects, rather than subjects. Read that as victims instead of soldiers.

We condemn forcing children to take part in greater social movements around them, but have more sympathy for the needs of those idealistic youngsters who feel a compulsion to participate or those youth who are forced to participate because of severe abuse against them or their families. For instance, there might be the possibility of setting up cadet programs similar to those in Sri Lanka, the US and other countries. Sri Lanka has a cadet program for those as young as 11 years old. The US has military academies for elementary and secondary school children funded by the Defense Dept, some of which might serve as a model.

In addition, the LTTE has informed UNICEF that it intends to use underage youths in its administrative service. Both these alternatives should be encouraged to serve as an outlet for those youth with the motivation to serve their people.

Pro-Government Bias of the Report

A. Partisan baggage

NESOHR thanks the author of the HRW report for taking the trouble and expense to travel to the NorthEast to talk to all parties concerned with child welfare. NESOHR regrets, however, the subtle and not-so-subtle government bias in this report on child soldiers. Some of this bias is towards the state in general and some towards the GOSL in particular.

The international community may portray the child soldier issue as a neutral one with benefit to all, but within the context of the war in Sri Lanka, no issue is neutral and very few of the players are either. In addition, the war is fought on many levels – military, political, financial, ideological and moral. HRW is aware of all these levels in making recommendations for action, so it is surprising that the NGO is unaware of the meaning of their report.

The child soldier issue is one that has been adopted by the government ever since it appeared on the international radar in the mid-1990s. It has been used so cynically by the government that the subject, whatever its true merits, has lost all credibility in the eyes of the vast majority of Tamils, unless it is raised in the context of child rights as a whole. The higher levels of UNICEF have, thankfully, understood this. The Office of the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict also understands the relationship, see his *Embarking on the Era of Application for the Protection of Children Exposed to Armed Conflict*.

For instance, it has been reported that recruitment has increased since April, 2004. A Tamil response to this report would include the fact that Pres. Kumaratunge's party won the elections in April and the alleged 'increase' in recruitment is a direct result of her ability to reinstate her previous policy of attempting to marginalize and isolate the LTTE.

HRW is arranging several events for the Tamil diaspora to publicize its report on child soldiers. These events will not be particularly successful because of this lack of acknowledgement of the partisan uses to which the child soldier issue has been applied.

The event in London was not helped by having an EPDP (an anti-LTTE paramilitary and political party financed by the Defense Ministry and used by the Sri Lankan armed forces for intelligence gathering) sympathizer portrayed as a 'neutral' person. The Canadian event did not have any Tamil speaker because of the difficulty of finding anybody who wanted to speak on such a partisan issue.

B. Report recommendations for the GOSL

In examining the pro-government bias of the report, we will look specifically at the recommendations for GOSL action (p. 10) proposed in the report.

a.- Most importantly, there is very little mention in the report about the GOSL's actions which push children toward leaving their home and family to join an armed group. For example, restrictions on fishing, a major source of livelihood and source of protein before the war, by the Sri Lankan armed forces is not noted. There is little mention of the continued sorry state of education, the children in detention without trial under the PTA, the lack of jobs or the hundreds of thousands of children who remain displaced because their homes are occupied by the military. There is no mention of the need for a permanent peace settlement ☐ the ultimate solution to the child soldier problem.

b.- Second, there is the extraordinary recommendation that the GOSL increase its 'presence' near schools, temple festivals and other areas of civilian habitation. An GOSL presence, of course, means a Sri Lankan armed forces or police presence and it is this presence which is exactly one of the push factors for recruitment. Intimidation of Tamil civilians by the Sinhalese armed forces is a primary cause and symptom of the conflict. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that formalized the ceasefire calls for the Sri Lankan armed forces to withdraw from areas of civilian habitation within a specified, short period of time, which they have done only selectively. Even though they withdrew from many of the schools they were occupying, the armed forces continue to have a significant presence on their perimeters and access roads in order to intimidate Tamil young people.

The Sri Lankan armed forces continue to station a high number of their troops in the Tamil areas, with active patrols and many checkpoints. There is one Sinhalese soldier for every 10 Tamil civilians in the Jaffna peninsula. Even more importantly, large parts of the Tamil areas have been declared High Security Zones, in defiance of the MOU and in violation of humanitarian laws, and made off-limits to civilians, leaving many tens of thousands of Tamils displaced and without livelihood. A map of these High Security Zones shows how they are placed to choke off Tamil movement and economic life, particularly in Jaffna and Vavuniya.

In Jaffna the armed forces are today in occupation of 150 sq. km. where over 30,000 families once lived. 24,000 families are still unable to resettle in this area, which includes 250 places of worship and 50 schools. 12,300 acres of land cannot be used for agriculture and 80 sq. km. of sea are out of bounds for fisherman. In Vavuniya the armed forces are still in occupation of 24 schools and 30 other public buildings and these civilian institutions are consequently unable to function. In Mannar, after 500 days of ceasefire, the armed forces occupy 5 school buildings, 150 private houses, 6 coconut and 2 palmyra estates, 40 public buildings, and 4 places of worship. This clearly shows how the freedom to live in one's

own home and place is being denied and how the normal life of the people is still affected by military occupation.

c.- The HRW report's third recommendation for the the GOSL is for more of the Sinhalese armed forces occupying Tamil areas to learn Tamil. This is an incredible endorsement of an oppressive status quo, only made possible by believing in the fairness of the Sri Lankan armed forces and the evil of the LTTE. There is a phrase included about increasing "the number of Tamil speakers in the army and police." An explicit statement that law and order should be handled by local authorities rather than an alien occupying force would have been very helpful. Did one believe that Indonesian police in East Timor were fair to the local population, whether or not they spoke the local language?

Those against the LTTE and/or any power exercised at the local level will use the excuse that the Sri Lankan armed forces and the GOSL's presence are required to prevent child recruitment, terrorism, unauthorized taxation and so on. This is the reason for the vast amount of state resources poured into creating the case that child recruitment exists and is the most important problem children have in the NorthEast. From the point of view of the majority of Tamils, it is a circular argument because it is precisely the lack of local control and army occupation which is a central push factor in taking up arms.

d.- Granting an amnesty for former child soldiers and ensuring that all eligible persons have identity cards are worthy recommendations. One needs to ask why a government that presumably cares so much for these children has not already done these relatively obvious steps. Providing good education and health care to all children is also the responsibility of the government.

e. The recommendation to waive traditional entry requirements for state-run vocational colleges is too narrow for several reasons. First, there is only one state-run vocational college in the NorthEast and more need to be established for the regeneration of the educational system. Since the report says that only 50% of the children released by the Karuna faction this spring are in school, more attention needs to be paid to get them in school. Emphasis is put on the fear that these children have of re-enlistment as a reason for not attending school. Close to 50% of children in many areas of the NorthEast are not in school, so the other explanation given 'lack of capacity of the implementing partners' is also of great importance, if one is also to believe GOSL excuses for why ordinary children are out of school. The GOSL's failure to provide resources for an educational system that it has deliberately destroyed is a major symptom of its lack of commitment to reconciliation and the peace process. A strong statement from HRW about the need to rapidly strengthen education at all levels in the NorthEast would have gone far toward allaying the perception that this is a partisan report.

f. - Deploying international human rights monitors is an excellent idea, however the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has a long way to go to gain credibility in the NorthEast and is therefore not a strong partner for this effort. Depending on Colombo-based, central government-generated institutions to be 'independent' (see p. 68) in a country not yet recovered from a 20-yr civil war is not a neutral act. Such a mistake would never be made by depending on a Russian human rights group to cover Chechnya.

The National Child Protection Agency is another of these central government-generated institutions that does not have any credibility on NorthEastern issues, yet is quoted in this report as an authority. Much is made in this report about how the TRO is affiliated with the LTTE, yet no mention is made of the possibility that these 'national' 'NGOs' might be compromised by their associations.

g. ¶ A few years ago the suggestion was made that one needed to count all children, then subtract the number in school from the total to find the number of total possible recruits the LTTE had to account for. What happened to this idea? What happened is that so many children are out of school that it is impractical. Depriving a generation of children of their education is an effective way to weaken and demoralize a community and is an important component of genocide.

h. ¶ Left out of the recommendations are any warnings to the GOSL if they do not improve the situation of children. There are no suggestions to cut off funding by donors, who kept giving and loaning funds to the GOSL even during the worst of the war and human rights abuses. The report suggests the Security Council(SC) might recommend cutting off small arms to the LTTE (talk about boiler plate!), but makes no mention of cutting off large arms to the GOSL. While the SC is curtailing the travel of top LTTEers, one might suggest that Pres. Kumaratunge and her top generals have their travel restricted for their past and present crimes against humanity, children in particular.

Left out of this report and all others, is the suggestion that international companies and governments that export landmines, supersonic bombers, heavy artillery and other military equipment that is used by the GOSL against civilians, or those who finance the GOSL's purchases, be held accountable for their actions in some international forum such as the International Criminal Court.

C. No intimidation by the Sri Lankan armed forces

One of the main recommendations we suggest that HRW make to the GOSL is that those of legal age who join the LTTE willingly or sympathize with the LTTE in government-held areas not suffer repercussions and their families be immune from intimidation by the Sri Lankan armed forces. This would encourage children to wait until they are of legal age, rather than leaving as soon as possible.

It is our understanding that the families of LTTE members suffer greatly, especially if it is known that the cadre joined willingly. This intimidation is an incentive for a great deal of story-telling about LTTE abuse and coercive recruitment. Some, if not all, those former underage recruits are fabricating stories to protect themselves from the army in whose area they must live.

Now, it is difficult for an outsider to know exactly which story to believe ¶ the GOSL's or the LTTE's. HRW has chosen to believe the GOSL's version of events.

D. UNICEF lists

The HRW report states that only 25% of the children released by the LTTE are on UNICEF lists. Rather than coming to HRW's conclusion that there are, therefore, many more underage recruits that have not yet been listed, one might infer that UNICEF's lists themselves are seriously flawed. The possibility of such a conclusion is not mentioned because HRW's conclusion had already been determined before the report was written.

Selective Use of Facts

A. Transit Centers

The most serious selective use of facts in the HRW report concerns the discussion of the transit centers. These transit centers were authorized by the Action Plan agreed between the GOSL and the LTTE. The

HRW report states that there were 3 envisioned, but only one is operational. The other two have been constructed, but have not opened because of the low numbers of children being released.

What is not mentioned is that the one operational transit center is in Kilinochchi in the North, while the largest accusations of child recruitment are, and always have been, in the East. Travel between the North and East is not easy because of GOSL ethnic cleansing, colonization and military installations.

Why have the transit centers in the East not been made operational instead of the one in the North? Perhaps it is true that all underage recruits have been demobilized in the North and there are no more to enter the transit center there. Not mentioning this possibility seems a clear case of anti-LTTE bias. The transit centers in the East also may not be very useful because all of Karuna's cadres returned home without the assistance of the transit centers. Now resources need to be used for education, medical care, etc. for these ex-cadres in their own homes. 50 % remain out of school. Do something if you really care for children!

B. UNICEF numbers

There is little way of checking the basic numbers of underage recruits that UNICEF presents. One can only trust that the individuals involved have the best interest of children in their hearts.

We have reason to believe that the numbers that UNICEF makes public have serious flaws. UNICEF would engender more confidence if it disclosed the sources of its figures and the methods for their collection.

We have heard that at one point this year the LTTE asked UNICEF for the names and particulars of the 1,000 children allegedly in their armed forces and were given a list of only 100 names.

One needs to remember 2 facts. First, the UN is an organization which has little innate sympathy for non-state actors (NSAs). Without a state sponsor, a NSA has little influence on the UN or its agencies, while governments are members by right.

Second, any individual hired by a UN agency or NGO has one of two problems. If he/she is Sri Lankan is compromised in one direction or another because, by this time, nobody is neutral, however much they portray themselves so. If he/she is from another country, they may be neutral, but will not be able to recognize the biases of the local people and thus the quality of the information they receive. An example is the HRW report stating that much information was received that the LTTE expected to recruit one child from each family. We read this that, since parental permission is desirable, parents are being requested to volunteer a child, not necessarily an underage one. This interpretation was not received by HRW.

Throughout the HRW report no effort is made to distinguish the reliability or bias of the sources. Sinhalese police chiefs, 'anti-terrorism' experts who built their career vilifying the LTTE, reporters too obviously paid by the GOSL, fly-by-night Tamil NGOs and reports written by the SLA are quoted with gay abandon. (see p. 6 & 16, for example) One suspects that UNICEF also may be using the same sources.

We do know that the GOSL and the Sri Lankan armed forces are working vigorously to generate as many numbers of underage recruits as possible. NESOHR has heard that in one day in October, 2004 the Sri Lankan Army Commander-in-Chief for the Jaffna District headquartered at the Palaly Airforce Base gave over 30 complaints of underage recruitment to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), all but one or

two were determined to be individuals in police detention, traveling, getting married or some such innocent excuse for absence. These allegations were not generated by the population, but directly by the SLA and the SLMM had to expend great resources to follow up on them.

Before the Ceasefire Agreement was signed in February, 2002, most specific allegations of underage recruitment were from circumscribed areas of the East under military control. It leads one to believe that similar Sri Lankan armed forces efforts were ongoing at that time and place.

Sri Lanka has the largest UNICEF child protection operation in the world. Vast resources are being expended on the problem in a country that does not have the largest number of child soldiers. Columbia, for instance, is supposed to have 11,000 child soldiers today. Why are issues of concern to Tamils 'education, resettlement, employment' not receiving similar attention? Sri Lanka has welcomed UNICEF for this particular issue to further its own agenda and HRW is a willing assistant.

If Tamils have a strong reaction to HRW's report, it is because of this nexus of interests between the GOSL and international actors, which seems designed not to take the rights and needs of the Tamil people into account.

C. LTTE bureaucracy & orphanages

Not discussed in much detail in this report is the fact that the LTTE holds significant parts of the NorthEast of Sri Lanka and runs an administration for almost 1 million people. The LTTE has political offices which work in the areas inhabited by the remaining 2 1/2 million inhabitants of the NorthEast. Since the 2002 ceasefire the LTTE's administrative structure and the social welfare programs provided by this structure have both increased dramatically. A work force is required to run such a bureaucracy. It might be worthwhile for those concerned about child recruitment to explore the complexities that such a situation presents. Is an unrecognized government any less a government?

As a related matter, the LTTE runs a number of orphanages for those from families with LTTE connections. A number of children allegedly recruited by the LTTE are placed in these facilities, whose locations are public and easy to visit, because their families are either deceased or not able to care for them. LTTE courts have started sending children in poor circumstances to these and other orphanages.

Ineffective Means to Achieve Result

A serious flaw in this report is that it is an ineffective means of achieving the desired result – the safety and well-being of any children in the LTTE. The recommendations aimed at coercing the LTTE to comply with international law reflect this ineffectualness. First, only certain international laws are emphasized and, after over 20 years of abuse, the LTTE and the Tamil people know how arbitrary this is. Second, with the efforts of the GOSL and the international community to isolate the LTTE, they have precious few levers on which to press.

The main leverage the international community has on the LTTE is that everyone, especially the Tamil community, want the best for the children of the NorthEast. Assisting in ensuring the well-being of children in all aspects and without political motive is the best way to maintain this leverage.

In addition, one of the international community's main interests is the return of the hundreds of thousands of Tamils who are refugees. Until the situation of children and their parents in the NorthEast improves overall, not many of these refugees will be interested in returning.