

Southern Thailand

Ongoing recruitment and use
of children by armed groups

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Front cover photo: Children participating in a public demonstration demanding the military withdraw a Special Forces unit from a village, Yala Province, 2007, Child Soldiers International

Child Soldiers International was formerly the Coalition to Stop the use of Child Soldiers. Child Soldiers International is an international human rights research and advocacy organization. Child Soldiers International seeks to end and prevent the military recruitment and use in hostilities of child soldiers (boys and girls below the age of 18), and other human rights abuses resulting from their association with armed forces or groups. The organization seeks the release of child soldiers from armed forces or groups, promotes their successful return to civilian life and accountability for those who recruit and use them. Child Soldiers International promotes global adherence to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

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The Cross Cultural Foundation (CrCF) was founded in 2002. It works on justice and the protection, promotion and monitoring of human rights in Thailand. CrCF's philosophy and activities are focused on strengthening human rights and delivering sustainable judicial reform throughout society, by working with wide range of stakeholders; both state and non- state actors. Particular emphasis is placed on marginalised people such as ethnic minority groups, stateless people, migrant workers and victims of conflict.

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1. Summary and main recommendations

At the beginning of 2014 the bitter separatist insurgency in Thailand's southernmost provinces entered its second decade. Grounded in a century of ethnic, cultural and religious tensions between the region's Malay-Muslim majority and the Thai state, the violence not only shows no indication of abating but appears to be becoming more intense.

Since the current separatist campaign first erupted back in January 2004, armed groups have targeted government forces and officials, ethnic Thai Buddhist civilians and local Muslims suspected of collaborating with government authorities. Well over 6,100 people have been killed to date and a further 11,000 injured. The vast majority of these casualties have been civilians, including women and children. Children have been victims of other grave violations, including attacks on schools, which have resulted in the killings of teachers and disrupted education

Research conducted by Child Soldiers International and the Cross Cultural Foundation (CrCF) shows that children as young as 14 have been recruited and used by armed groups operating in southern Thailand. In December 2013, children under the age of 18 were present in the ranks of the dominant armed opposition group, the Patani Malay National Revolutionary Front (*Barisan Revolusi Nasional Melayu Patani* or BRN). Child Soldiers International and CrCF interviewed 26 former and current members of armed groups, at least 13 of whom were recruited below the age of 18. Among these were five children, who were recruited between 2011 and 2012 in Narathiwat province and continued to be with the BRN in late 2013.

Recruitment into the ranks of the BRN is triggered by a sense of historical grievances and injustice and by a perceived religious obligation to fight against those seen as representing or supporting the Thai government. Recruitment of under-18s into the ranks of the BRN appears to be voluntary, the result of community pressure and a sense of solidarity with the Malay-Muslim community combined with a sense of outrage at state repression and human rights violations.

Most children recruited into the BRN are employed as lookouts to gather intelligence on state security forces. Child Soldiers International and CrCF's research also found evidence of some under-18s engaged in the use of firearms, in active combat during insurgent operations, and in performing other support roles such as working as informers.

Along with other recruits, children go through a carefully structured process of indoctrination and training. Those who are selected to join the military wing of the armed group receive additional weapon and military training. The indoctrination and training period appears to have been shortened considerably in recent years because of heightened state surveillance in recent years.

The Thai government does not formally acknowledge the recruitment and use of under-18s by armed groups either, although security officials on the ground are aware that it is occurring. In fact, the Thai government has denied that southern Thailand meets the criteria of a situation of armed conflict in accordance with international humanitarian law. This is contradicted by the situation on the ground, where protracted armed violence between the Thai forces and armed organised groups suggests the current situation in southern Thailand amounts to a non-international armed conflict.

To the best of Child Soldiers International and CrCF's knowledge, there has been no comprehensive research on the recruitment and use of children by armed groups in southern Thailand.¹ While access constraints

¹ Some reports on the impact of violence on children in southern Thailand include: UNICEF, *Everyday Fears: A study of children's perceptions of living in the southern border area of Thailand*, 2008; รอสานี เจาะอาแซและคณะ. สถานการณ์เด็กและสตรีใน 5 จังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้ พ.ศ. 2556 (มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์, 2556), Rohani Jeh-asae et al., *The situation of children and women in the five southern border provinces in 2013*, Prince of Songkhla University, 2013;

imposed by volatile security conditions make it difficult to gather detailed information, efforts need to be made to comprehensively document and monitor the recruitment and use of children in the south.

Recommendations to armed groups

- Immediately end the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 years and release all under-18s within their ranks without fear of reprisal for the children or their families;
- Publicly agree to abide by international standards to prohibit and prevent the recruitment and use of children;
- Issue and enforce orders to all militants to prohibit child recruitment and use, and widely disseminate the orders to members of the armed groups and to the communities in areas where armed groups operate;
- Allow access by the UN and other independent humanitarian organisations for the purpose of monitoring, identifying, releasing and reintegrating all children from their ranks.

Recommendations to the Thai Government

- Together with national and international child rights and child protection organisations, establish a system for monitoring and reporting on the recruitment and use of children by non-state armed groups and on the impact of the conflict in southern Thailand on children, particularly on their physical and mental health and education;
- On the basis of systematic data collection, develop multi-faceted, multi-agency strategies to alleviate the impact of the conflict on children and prevent child recruitment and use by armed groups;
- Expressly criminalise the recruitment and use in hostilities of any persons under the age of 18 years in armed forces and non-state armed groups;
- Ensure that civilian and military officials in southern Thailand are trained in children's rights, including the provisions of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC), and are aware of their roles to prevent and address underage recruitment.

Recommendations to the UN Country Team

- Develop a coordinated strategy to monitor the risk of underage recruitment and other grave violations against children in southern Thailand;
- Support NGOs and civil society groups working on the issues of child protection, child rights, and the eradication of the use of under-18s by armed groups.

2. Scope and methodology

This report investigates the recruitment and use of children by armed groups, such as the BRN, in southern Thailand. Child Soldiers International and CrCF conducted research in nine districts in the southern provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Songkhla between September 2013 and April 2014. The report also draws upon additional research carried out by an independent researcher in southern Thailand between July and August 2012 and June and July 2013. Child Soldiers International and CrCF interviewed 26 former and current members of armed groups, at least 13 of whom were recruited below the age of 18. At the time of the interviews, five of them were children and still involved with armed groups, including the BRN. In addition, three individuals detained while they were under 18 and subsequently prosecuted for security-

มูลนิธิผสานวัฒนธรรม เครือข่ายส่งเสริมสิทธิและเข้าถึงความยุติธรรม กลุ่มด้วยใจ. รายงานสถานการณ์เด็กและผู้หญิง จังหวัดชายแดนใต้ ปี 2556 (พีเพรส, 2557) [Cross Cultural Foundation, Network for the Promotion of Rights and Access to Justice (HAP), Duai Jai Group, *Report on the Situation of Children and Women in the Southern Border Provinces in 2013*, P Press, 2014].

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related crimes were interviewed. Child Soldiers International and CrCF conducted interviews with officials from the Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Police and the Justice Ministry's Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection and other government officers. Representatives of Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), national NGOs, community-based organisations and lawyers were also interviewed for this research.

Due to the secretive and clandestine nature of armed groups operating in southern Thailand, it was not always possible to establish which specific groups were responsible for recruiting children. However, Child Soldiers International and CrCF found sufficient evidence to suggest that the children were likely to be associated with the BRN, which is considered to be the most organised and militarily active of the groups present in the region. Further research and monitoring is required to ensure that the scope of association of children with armed groups is fully understood and acted upon.

Child Soldiers International and CrCF took great care to ensure that former and current child soldiers and former detainees were interviewed in safe conditions and were comfortable speaking about their experiences. The interviews took place privately, but in the presence of trusted community members. These interviews would not have been possible without the assistance of community-based organisations. Real names of interviewees and precise locations of interviews have been withheld due to security concerns.

3. Background

3.1. History of armed conflict

Tensions in southern Thailand date back more than a century. They rose sharply in the years following the signing of the 1909 Anglo-Siamese Treaty between Thailand and Great Britain, when the Sultanate of Patani, historically governed by Muslim rulers who paid tribute to Siam, came under the direct rule of Bangkok.² Today approximately 80 per cent of the population of this region, which includes Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala provinces, as well as parts of Songkhla, are ethnic Malay-Muslims, who speak a local dialect of Malay rather than Thai, and who are ethnically, culturally and religiously distinct from Thailand's majority Theravada Buddhist population.³

Opposition to the annexation began almost immediately and continued for most of the 20th century. Economic and political neglect, combined with harsh policies of suppression and assimilation, interspersed by efforts towards conciliation, by the Thai authorities served to fuel local resentment and resistance. Up until the 1960s, resistance was largely non-violent and demands were mostly limited to some degree of autonomy and improved respect for minority rights.

An armed struggle began in the 1960s with the emergence of three main armed groups - the Patani National Liberation Front (BNPP), the BRN and the PULO. These groups, along with other smaller groups, were particularly active in the 1970s and early 1980s. This generally low-level violence appeared to peter out in the 1990s, but in fact a new generation of armed groups had been using the so-called "quiet time" of the 1990s to regroup and reorganise underground.⁴ Scattered militant attacks aimed mainly at seizing weapons began again in the early 2000s but it was only after the 4 January 2004 raid on an army depot in Narathiwat – in which some 430 firearms were stolen and four Buddhist soldiers were killed – that the armed groups'

² Thanet Aphornsuvan, *History and politics of the Muslims in Thailand*, December 2003, p. 14, seap.einaudi.cornell.edu/system/files/MuslimThailand.pdf.

³ In Thailand, 94.6 per cent of the population is Buddhist, 4.6 per cent Muslim, and 0.7 per cent Christian. Thailand's National Statistical Office, 2011, <http://service.nso.go.th/nso/nsopublish/themes/files/soc-culPocket.pdf>. The survey was conducted among Thai citizens aged above 13 years.

⁴ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, interviews with former -militants recruited and trained in the 1990s, Narathiwat, October – November 2013; also see Anthony Davis, "No peace tomorrow for South Thailand", *Asia Times Online*, 12 July 2013; รุ่งรวี เฉลิมศรีภิญโญรัช, ถอดความคิดขบวนการเอกราชปาตานี (ตีพิมพ์, 2556), หน้า 30-32 [Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat, *Dissecting the thinking of the Patani separatist movement*, Deep Book, 2013, p. 30-32].

military operations escalated dramatically.

Despite large-scale counter-insurgency sweeps by government forces over the years, the level of violence today still remains stubbornly high. The armed groups' military wing, which has proved innovative, adaptive and lethally unpredictable, has relied heavily on the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Attacks have focused on security force patrols but also included civilian targets; and since 2012 the IEDs, including car-bombs, have become notably larger and more sophisticated. Meanwhile, targeted killings, mostly in the form of drive-by shootings by armed groups and small-scale attacks on police and army bases, have continued almost daily. During 2013 and through the first half of 2014, the conflict was claiming an average of around 50 lives each month with numbers of wounded still higher.⁵

3.2. Armed opposition groups in southern Thailand

The structure and composition of the armed opposition groups currently active in southern Thailand remains opaque. No group has claimed responsibility for violent attacks in the past decade and the rationale for their struggle has been articulated mainly through word of mouth, banners, leaflets and graffiti in public places. Interviews with Child Soldiers International and CrCF show that rank-and-file members of armed groups are not aware of the name of the group to which they belong, or the names of their leaders. In keeping with a strategy based on clandestine organisation, each member only knows a limited number of counterparts with whom they are in direct contact.⁶ Reflecting such secrecy, the generic term, the 'movement', is often used to indicate those activities and supporters of the armed groups operating in southern Thailand.

While information on the precise number of separate armed groups currently active remains unclear, there is consensus among most analysts that the BRN is the dominant group on the ground. PULO appears to lack a significant military presence on the ground and thus has only a limited role in military operations.⁷

The organisational structure of the BRN has been contested in recent years. Some analysts have maintained that it is decentralised and consists of autonomous cells which operate independently.⁸ On the other hand, Thai military intelligence analysts and other researchers have argued that the BRN has a well organised structure with a leadership council known as the *Dewan Pimpinan Parti* (DPP) and two main chains of command – the political and military wings.⁹ Hassan Taib, leader of the BRN representatives at the February

⁵ Statistics compiled by Anthony Davis, Bangkok-based security analyst with IHS-Jane's.

⁶ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Narathiwat, October - December 2013. Also see International Crisis Group, *Recruiting Militants in Southern Thailand*, 22 June 2009, p. 7, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-east-asia/thailand/170_recruiting_militants_in_southern_thailand.pdf

⁷ PULO's senior leaders accept that their military strength cannot compete with that of the BRN, interview with a former PULO member, Pattani, 1 November 2013. In 2012, Lt. Gen. Udomchai Thammasaroraj, then Fourth Army Commander, said the PULO had no military force on the ground and no role in the conflict in southern Thailand. His remark followed a call from Kasturi Makota, leader of a PULO faction, to engage with his group in a peace dialogue. "สมช.ออกมาเล็งจับหนึ่งเจรจา แม่ทัพภาค 4 ละ "กัศตูรี" สร้างราคา", สถาบันข่าวอิสรา, 26 กุมภาพันธ์ 2556, [Isra News Agency, "NSC to talk to M'sia to start negotiation, 4th Army commander criticised Kasturi making himself important", 26 February 2013].

⁸ See: Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*, Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 174-175 and Joseph Chinyong Liow and Don Pathan, *Confronting ghosts: Thailand's shapeless southern insurgency*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2010, p. 8-10.

⁹ See ชินวัฒน์ แม้นเดช (พินเอก), กระบวนการเข้าสู่การเป็นสมาชิกองค์กรการต่อสู้ของขบวนการก่อความไม่สงบในพื้นที่ 3 จังหวัดชายแดนใต้ และแนวทางในการหยุดยั้ง, เอกสารวิจัยเสนอต่อวิทยาลัยป้องกันราชอาณาจักร, 2555 [Shinnawat Maendej (Col.), *The Recruitment Process of Insurgent Movement in Southern Thailand and Preventive Strategies*, a thesis submitted to National Defense College, 2012]; Sascha Helbardt, *Deciphering Southern Thailand's Violence: Organisation and Insurgent Practices of BRN-Coordinate*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Passau, 2011; Marc Askew and Sascha Helbardt, "Becoming Patani Warriors: Individuals and the Insurgent Collective in Southern Thailand", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 35, No. 11, 2012, p. 784 – 785; Anthony Davis, "No peace tomorrow for South Thailand", Asia Times Online, 12 July 2013; and Rungrawee Chalermripinyorat, Dissecting the thinking of the Patani separatist movement, op.cit.

2013 peace talks,¹⁰ referred to a “shura council” as a body that makes collective decisions on the movement’s direction.¹¹ Irrespective of the precise nature of the leadership structure, one thing is clear: the pattern and level of armed violence during the time of the peace talks between the government and the BRN in 2013 appeared broadly to confirm the argument that the BRN senior leadership exercises a significant degree of control over local commanders on the ground.¹²

According to the Thai military, the organisational structure of the insurgency broadly mirrors the administrative levels of the Thai state. The smallest units operate at the village-level with the *ajak* (an abbreviation of the Malay words *Ahli Jawatan Kampung*, or ‘village committee’) forming the basic building block of the political wing.¹³ The smallest military unit is the village-based RKK (an acronym of the Malay words *Runda Kumpulan Kecil*, or ‘small patrol group’).¹⁴ Higher levels of political and military organisation exist at the district and provincial level.

This clear separation between the political and military wings has been significantly impacted by government counter-insurgency efforts, however, and is today largely theoretical. In practice, the work of the two wings often overlaps.¹⁵

Estimates on the number of individuals involved in the BRN and other armed groups active in southern Thailand vary widely. The Thai military estimates that the groups consist of a 300-strong leadership with 3,000 active operatives and about 10,000 supporters.¹⁶ However, it is likely that the number of supporters ready to provide logistical and intelligence support is significantly higher than that.¹⁷ Given the clandestine nature of the insurgency, the accuracy of these estimates remains contested.

The porous border between Thailand and Malaysia coupled with strong ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic connections between the two countries allows fighters to easily cross over to seek refuge in time of need and operate from the neighbouring country.¹⁸ The Malaysian government denies it is providing support

¹⁰ On 28 February 2013, the Thai government agreed to hold talks in Malaysia with the BRN in an attempt to seek an end to the armed conflict. The two sides agreed to reduce hostilities during the month of Ramadan from 10 July to 18 August. Although there was no sharp drop of violence and casualties in 2013, it saw the lowest rate of civilian deaths since the resurgence of violence in 2004. A total of 303 civilians were killed in 2013 compared with 768 in 2007 – the year that saw the highest rate of civilian casualties since 2004. At the time of writing, the dialogue is suspended owing largely to the unresolved political turmoil in Bangkok.

¹¹ See “Exclusive: ถอดบทสัมภาษณ์พิเศษ ‘ฮัสซัน คอฮิบ’ แกนนำBRN (1), ประชาไท, 20 มิถุนายน 2556”, [Prachatai, “Exclusive interview with Hassan Taib, BRN leader: Part I”, 20 June 2013.

¹² See Srisompob Jitpiromsri and Anders Engvall, *A Meaningful Peace: Ramadan Ceasefire Assessment*, Deep South Watch, 9 September 2013, <http://www.deepsouthwatch.org/node/4720>; and Anthony Davis, “Separatists Strike: The Ramadan Offensive in southern Thailand”, *Jane’s Terrorism and Security Monitor*, 16 August 2013.

¹³ Child Soldiers International and CrCF’s interviews with military officers, June - July 2013. Also see Shinnawat Maendej (Col.), *The Recruitment Process of Insurgent Movement in Southern Thailand and Preventive Strategies*, op.cit.

¹⁴ As a rule, two units of RKK become one *regu* (squad), three *regu* becomes one *platong* (platoon) and three *platong* becomes one *kompi* (company) and three *kompi* becomes one *batalion* (battalion). *Harimau* (commandos) and *letupan* (bomb-making unit) are separate units but are also attached to this structure. บินหลา ปัตตานี (นามปากกา), *องค์กรปฏิวัติปัตตานีคือใคร*, จัดพิมพ์ส่วนบุคคลโดยเจ้าหน้าที่ทหาร, 2555. [Binla Pattani (pseudonym), *Who is the Revolutionary Patani Movement?*, privately published by military officers, 2012].

¹⁵ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Yala and Narathiwat, October – December 2013 and in Narathiwat, April 2014. A 23-year-old insurgent who heads a 12-member team of militants in Narathiwat told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that his group is responsible for military operations and it reports to the *ajak*. He said there are about 20 groups reporting to this *ajak*, about 17 of which are involved in military operations and another three engaged in political work. According to him, each military group enjoys a significant degree of autonomy in identifying targets, planning and carrying out attacks.

¹⁶ *Associated Foreign Press*, “Army chief says Thailand facing 3,000 militants”, 2 April 2012.

¹⁷ International Crisis Group, *Thailand: The Evolving Conflict in the South*, 11 December 2012, p. 3.

¹⁸ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with former and current militants in Narathiwat and Yala, including with militants living in hiding in Malaysia, October – November 2013. Also see John Funston,

to armed groups in southern Thailand.¹⁹

Information on how BRN funds its operations remains sketchy but the armed group's emphasis has been on local self-sufficiency. The collection of small sums from supporters to finance local activities and co-operatives run by its members is known to be one element of this system, which while financially limited is symbolically meaningful. According to Thai military intelligence sources, a more important source of income for southern separatist groups comes from unlawful 'taxation' of the illicit cross-border trafficking of narcotics and contraband fuel; and through levying 'protection fees' on local business enterprises, typically owned by Sino-Thai individuals or companies.²⁰

4. Children's involvement in the armed groups

Research conducted by Child Soldiers International and CrCF demonstrates that armed groups operating in southern Thailand have recruited children as young as 14-years-old and used them to participate in hostilities, either in active fighting or in supporting roles, such as lookouts and informers.

Child Soldiers International and CrCF interviewed 13 members of armed groups who joined when under the age of 18 years. These included five who were still under 18 at the time of the interview and continued to be associated with the BRN in December 2013. The youngest among these was 14 when he joined in 2011.²¹

It is not possible to establish the scale of involvement of children with armed groups in southern Thailand, however information gathered by Child Soldiers International and CrCF points to certain patterns in the recruitment processes, training and use of children in military operations. Although the BRN is widely believed to be the most significant armed group in the current conflict, both in terms of number of members and of military activities, recruits are as a matter of practice not told the name of the group they are joining, nor the names of their leaders. Some recruits curious to know their leaders were told, "If it is a good thing, you just go along with it and don't have to ask".²²

5. Motivations to join the armed groups

Child Soldiers International and CrCF found no direct evidence of under-18s being forcibly recruited into the ranks of the BRN.²³ However social pressure and religious indoctrination often places a notable onus on children and youth to join. Similarly, while parental consent was not always sought, there is no evidence to show that parents have opposed their children's decision to join the armed group. The decision to join the BRN appears to be influenced by individual experiences and circumstances, with community and family ties playing a crucial role in the close-knit, mostly rural communities, from which the armed groups draw most of their support. Child Soldiers International and CrCF's research found that some under-18s grew up with family members who were members of armed groups; or had family members or close friends killed or arrested by the Thai security forces; or lived in an area known to be a stronghold of an armed group.²⁴

Prior to 2004, historical grievances and a sense of religious duty appeared to be central factors driving

"Thailand's Southern Fires: the Malaysian Factor", *UNEAC Asia Papers*, vol. 26, 2008, p. 55-67.

¹⁹ A joint press statement, issued during the Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Rasak's official visit to Thailand in 2009 states that both Thailand and Malaysia "condemned the perpetration of violence by individuals and ill-intentioned groups against innocent civilians in the Southern Border Provinces (SBPs), particularly women and children".

²⁰ IHS Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, BRN, September 2013.

²¹ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Yala and Narathiwat, November and December 2013.

²² Child Soldiers International and CrCF, interview with a former militant, Pattani, 24 December 2013.

²³ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with underage militants, Yala and Narathiwat, October - December 2013.

²⁴ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Yala and Narathiwat, October - December 2013.

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Malay-Muslims to take part in the armed struggle. A member of the BRN who joined in 1992 in Narathiwat, at the age of 16, told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that his *ustadz* ('religious teacher'), who taught Islamic subjects in his secondary school, taught him about the history of the Patani Sultanate in informal sessions conducted in a small group outside the classroom. He was told that Pattani was formerly *Dar-al Islam*, a land governed by Muslim rulers where *shari'a* ('Islamic Law') was the supreme law, and that it was the duty of Malay-Muslims to reclaim this status by fighting for the independence of Patani.²⁵ Another former militant, recruited in 2002 at the age of 17, was also reportedly inspired by a sense of religious obligation. He said that a relative, who was an Islamic teacher, told him that Malay-Muslims had a duty to wage a jihad to regain their Patani homeland.²⁶

In the last decade, other motivations driving young Malay-Muslims to join the insurgency have become more prominent. Interviews conducted by Child Soldiers International and CrCF showed that the violent repression of Malay-Muslims by Thai security forces, including ongoing human rights violations, that the potential recruits directly experienced or witnessed were the main reasons given for joining an armed group. "A desire for vengeance" is what most young Malay-Muslims interviewed described as the main force driving them to join the armed struggle.²⁷

Sulaiman²⁸, who joined the movement in 2011 at the age of 15, said that he was driven by revenge for the brutal treatment of Malay-Muslim demonstrators in the Tak Bai incident²⁹ and other attacks where some of his friends and acquaintances were killed, detained, and reportedly tortured by security forces. Another 14-year-old who joined the insurgency in 2011 told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that a series of incidents in which Malay-Muslims were ill-treated motivated him to join the armed struggle. These included the shooting of a woman in his village, allegedly by a paramilitary ranger, which sparked a protest calling for the withdrawal of the rangers from their base in the village public school.³⁰

6. Modalities of recruitment

6.1. Identification and approach of potential recruits

Historically, some private Islamic schools and traditional Islamic schools – both informally called *ponoh* - appear to have been the main recruitment ground for armed groups. Schools have been particularly significant because they have been a major point of contention in the clash of cultures and ideologies fuelling the conflict: a large number of Malay-Muslims view state schools as a vehicle to impose "Thai-ness", while the government sees Islamic schools as a tool for Malay nationalist indoctrination.³¹ It is important to stress that the majority of both traditional and private Islamic schools in the southern border provinces are not believed to be recruiting centres for armed groups. However, it appears that a minority of such schools have been used to indoctrinate and recruit children.

Three former BRN members told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that they were encouraged to join the militancy by their religious teachers and older friends in their respective schools. They were under-18 at

²⁵ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with an ex-militant, Pattani, 1 November 2013.

²⁶ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with an ex-militant, Pattani, 22 October 2013.

²⁷ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with current militants, including under-18s, Narathiwat, November and December 2013.

²⁸ Pseudonym assigned to protect his identity.

²⁹ On 25 October 2004, during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Thai security forces violently dispersed demonstrators in front of Tak Bai district police station in Narathiwat, using water cannons, teargas, batons, and live bullets. Seven protesters died from gunshot wounds to the head. Around 1,300 men were arrested and loaded into army trucks to be taken to Inkayuthabarihan Camp in Pattani for questioning. Their hands were tied behind their backs and they were loaded on trucks with their hands tied behind their backs - a result of which 78 detainees suffocated to death.

³⁰ "สื่อจับไล่ทหารพรานพื้นหมู่บ้าน", โพสต์ทูเดย์, 27 กันยายน 2547, [Post Today, "Rangers demanded to leave the village", 27 September 2004.

³¹ International Crisis Group, *Recruiting Militants in Southern Thailand*, 22 June 2009.

the time when they took a *sumpah* ('oath'), to mark their entry into the armed group.³² Two boys, aged 17 at the time of the interview, were recruited by an *ustadz* at a traditional *ponoh* in Narathiwat in 2011, a few weeks after he taught them in a 40-day religious course which was delivered to a wider class. The open course allowed the *ustadz* to identify potential recruits.³³

In recent years, due partly to the tightening of government regulations and increased surveillance by state security forces of Islamic schools,³⁴ young recruits are also increasingly approached to join the armed group through a network of friends and acquaintances in their communities outside the schools. Three male members of the armed group, two of whom were 16 and 17 at the time of the interview, were contacted by their friends in the same village who were already part of the armed group.³⁵

6.2. Indoctrination process and training

The indoctrination process normally takes place after potential recruits take a *sumpah*, pledging allegiance to the movement in front of the Quran.³⁶ The oath-taking ceremony is a powerful cultural tool to ensure secrecy and obedience. As previously noted, new recruits are normally not told the name of the organisation, with which they will serve.

After taking the *sumpah*, the new recruits undergo a period of indoctrination focusing on the history of Pattani, the Islamic concept of Jihad, and physical exercise. A former instructor, who trained new recruits from 1996 to 2004, told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that the process of training for new recruits during his time consisted of five steps. It is widely accepted that the content of this training program remains unchanged. The steps involved: (1) a discussion on the glorious past of Patani; (2) cultivating a sense of dedication among *juwae* ('future fighters') and introducing the "ten disciplines"³⁷; (3) building physical strength; (4) testing their commitment and courage by assigning them low-risk insurgency-related tasks such as spraying graffiti in public places, destroying state property and distributing leaflets; and (5) conducting physical training in pairs, first aid training and learning about jihad struggles in other countries.

After this training, a committee decides on assigning recruits to either the military or political wing of the group, taking into account to some extent the individual's personal preference. Those assigned to the military wing are required to take two additional military training courses also called (*tadika*³⁸ and *ponoh* -, focusing on physical stamina, weapons training with a range of small-arms such as M-16 and AK-series assault rifles

³² Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with ex-militants recruited prior to 2004, Pattani and Yala, October and November 2013.

³³ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Yala, 3 December 2013.

³⁴ Two private Islamic schools –Jihad Wittaya in Pattani and Islam Burapha in Narathiwat- were closed down in 2005 and 2007 respectively after security forces raided the schools and found evidence of insurgent-related activities, such as explosive materials and some "propaganda" materials. In February 2012, the Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre (SBPAC), under the leadership of Police Col. Tawee, approved the reopening of Islam Burapha but in September 2012, the Anti-Money Laundering Office seized the school's assets on the grounds that it was used as a venue for bomb-making. *Bangkok Post*, "Amlu seized Narathiwat school assets", 4 September 2012.

³⁵ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with male militants, Narathiwat, 5 December 2013.

³⁶ An example of wording recited by participants of the *sumpah*: "*In the name of God, the Almighty, and Compassionate we will be loyal and obedient to our leader and the organisation for the sake of the Malay and Muslim people. If I violate the rules established by the organisation, my blood may be shed.*" See for instance: International Crisis Group, *Recruiting Militants in Southern Thailand*, 22 June 2009, p. 8.

³⁷ The ten disciplines are: 1) Uphold religion and faith in Allah and refrain from any sinful acts; 2) Be loyal and obedient to the leaders; 3) Give priority to the public interest before one's own; 4) Keep your words and promises; 5) Keep the secrecy of the group and never reveal it to the enemy; 6) Avoid doing anything that would tarnish the resistance movement; 7) Carry out works suitable to one's own capability and potentials; 8) Attend meetings or training assigned; 9) Give or take warning and criticism with open-mindedness and sincerity; 10) Sacrifice one's life and property for the struggle when necessary. Information based on captured materials obtained from the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).

³⁸ In a widely known sense, *Tadika* denotes an Islamic-learning school for young children which is often operated by mosques.

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and M-79 grenade launchers, and guerrilla tactics. Trainees displaying real potential may be selected for military training for so-called 'commando' units. This involves specialised courses in jungle warfare (*harimau* or 'tiger'), bomb-making and demolition (*letupan*), close-quarter assault (*serang handak*) and combat medicine (*perubatan*).³⁹

While the length of the training may vary depending on the circumstances, the ideological underpinning and contents of the training remain unchanged. In recent years, the training period has been shortened considerably as state surveillance has intensified. Child Soldiers International and CrCF's research found that an indoctrination programme which took place in 2011 combined teaching on Patani's history, Islam and military training in one integrated programme, which lasted two months. According to the course coordinator, the first 15 days were devoted to the study of the Quran and Patani's history, another 15 days to jungle survival skills, and the second month to military training. Training locations are constantly shifted from village ground to the jungle, depending on the security situation.⁴⁰

After completing physical training sessions, new recruits move on to military-style training. One former militant trainer described the specialised training that he provided to children, included planting bombs. A 17-year-old member of an armed group who had received this training confirmed the practice.

According to a member of an armed group, the first stage of training for new recruits involves training using imitation wooden guns and bladed weapons. Only later, it appears, are selected youth divided into groups of up to 15 members – each from a different village and none of whom know each other – for training in the use of real firearms. Child Soldier International and CrCF interviewed three of the 20 new recruits trained in 2011, who were below 18 at the time of the training and were told that other trainees were “of the same age” and that they all underwent military training.⁴¹

6.3. Use of underage recruits

The secrecy surrounding the activities of armed groups makes it difficult to ascertain in detail the roles of different members prior to, during and after a military operation. However, information collected by Child Soldiers International and CrCF shows that under-18s have been used to participate in attacks and, more frequently, in supporting roles, such as preparing explosives and acting as look-outs during military operations by armed groups.

A 23-year-old member of an armed group linked to the BRN who heads a 12-member team of militants in Narathiwat told Child Soldiers International and CrCF that he used a few under-18s in his team because there were not enough adult fighters. According to him, children are normally not assigned to participate directly in combat because they are usually too young to exercise good judgement in critical situations.⁴² However, in the immediate aftermath of an attack, children could be tasked to collect captured weapons from a nearby but secure location to place them in a safe house.⁴³

Child Soldiers International and CrCF collected testimonies from children who claimed to have been involved in military operations. A 17-year-old member in this Narathiwat team told Child Soldiers International and CrCF he was involved in a military operation at the age of 15. He said that he was involved

³⁹ มะนิง ปัตตานี, อาร์ เค เค เป็นใคร ทำไมต้องเป็น RKK, จัดพิมพ์ส่วนบุคคลโดยเจ้าหน้าที่ทหาร, 2554, หน้า 82 – 89, [Ma-ning Pattani (pseudonym), *Who is RKK? Why does one become RKK?* privately published by military officers, 2011, p. 82-89.

⁴⁰ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with a militant, who was a coordinator of the indoctrination programme, Narathiwat, 8 April 2014.

⁴¹ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with militants, Narathiwat, 5 December 2013 and a militant who coordinated the indoctrination programme, Narathiwat, 8 April 2014.

⁴² Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with a militant who coordinated the indoctrination programme, Narathiwat, 6 November 2013 and 8 April 2014.

⁴³ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with the leader of a 12-member group, Narathiwat, 8 April 2014.

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in both shooting and bombing operations after attending a two-month training programme. He assembled different parts of an IED, which was made and brought over by a different team, and planted the IEDs at selected locations. In yet another incident which involved shooting, his task was to ride a motorcycle for his partner in a drive-by shooting at security forces.⁴⁴ Another 16-year-old in the same team was asked to monitor the movement of security forces prior to an attack by the armed group. As of April 2014, both children were in hiding in Malaysia after having fled about a year earlier for fear of arrest because they had been identified by villagers for carrying out a failed shooting attack against Territorial Defence Volunteers (commonly known as *Or Sor*), security force elements maintained by the Thai Ministry of Interior.⁴⁵

Beyond these cases, Child Soldiers International and CrCF's research found examples of the use of children to gather intelligence on the movement of security forces, a practice which appears to be common. A militant, who was 16-years-old at the time of the interview and who joined the underground movement in 2011, said that she has been assigned to keep an eye on the movement of soldiers in her village in Narathiwat's Sri Sakorn district; to note specific routes used by the military during their patrols; and draw up a timetable of their routine operations. She also helped monitor the roads when militants planned to visit their families in the village. In Bacho, another district in Narathiwat, two male militants, both aged 17 at the time of the interview, had acted as scouts after they took a *sumpah*. They were told to report on the movement of soldiers in their village but had not been involved in any military operation nor had they undergone military training.⁴⁶

7. Responses to armed groups' recruitment and use of children

To date, effective monitoring and appropriate responses to the on-going recruitment and use of children by armed groups have been almost entirely lacking. The Thai government has formally denied the existence of child soldiers and relied mainly on a security-centred response to the armed conflict in the south. The UN has yet to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with the issue, despite reports of child recruitment and other grave violations of child's rights being mentioned in the UN Secretary-General's reports on children and armed conflict since 2009.

The Thai state has responded to the resurgence of violence with a heavy deployment of forces. There are some 72,000-strong security personnel currently deployed in the south, including the Royal Thai Army and Royal Thai Marine Corps regulars, police, paramilitary rangers and *Or Sor*.⁴⁷

Three special laws are imposed in different parts of southern Thailand. The Internal Security Act (ISA) is enforced in Sabayoi, Na Thawi, Chana and Thepa districts in Songkhla province, and Mae Lan district in Pattani province, where the situation is considered less critical. Martial Law and the Emergency Decree have been concurrently imposed throughout the remaining districts in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat provinces. Under these laws, individuals, including children, have been detained for up to 37 days without charge. There have been persistent reports of torture during detention under these laws.⁴⁸ Despite pressure by national and international NGOs and intergovernmental organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)⁴⁹ on the Thai government to lift Martial Law and/or the Emergency Decree, these laws

⁴⁴ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interview with an underage militant, Narathiwat, 5 December 2013.

⁴⁵ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with underage militants, Narathiwat, 5 December 2013.

⁴⁶ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, confidential interviews with underage militants, Narathiwat, 3 December 2013.

⁴⁷ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, interview with a senior army officer of the ISOC's Region 4, 11 June 2014.

⁴⁸ Muslim Attorney Centre, an NGO providing legal assistance for suspected insurgents, states that it received 368 complaints of torture between 2008 and 2013. The trend was on the decrease for five years but it rose again in 2013 with 58 cases of complaints compared to 38 in the previous year. Statistics of Muslim Attorney Centre made available to Child Soldiers International.

⁴⁹ The OIC expressed its regret for the continuation of the use of the Emergency Decree in southern Thailand in the resolutions on Muslim communities and minorities in Non-OIC member states adopted by the 39th Session of the

remain enforced in most parts of southern Thailand.⁵⁰ In response to the growing conflict at the national level between the former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her opponents, the military imposed Martial Law throughout the country on 20 May 2014, before taking power in a coup d'état two days later.⁵¹

In 2013, the then government launched a formal peace dialogue, facilitated by Malaysia, with the BRN.⁵² However, the peace dialogue has been stalled since the dissolution of parliament in December 2013 amid growing political crisis in Thailand. The prospect for resolving the conflict in the south through peace talks appears unlikely under the current military rule.⁵³

In this military and political context, there are currently no programs to monitor and prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed opposition groups and assist them in their rehabilitation and reintegration. In the absence of a government strategy to protect children or assist those associated with armed groups, children remain vulnerable to abuse and violence. In fact, children suspected of association with armed groups are sometimes administratively detained under the special laws applicable in southern Thailand or are requested to join military-run re-education programs.⁵⁴

While the UN has some presence in southern Thailand, it has not yet established a comprehensive mechanism to monitor abuses against children in the context of the ongoing armed conflict. The need to conduct independent verification and reports on alleged violations against children has been repeatedly urged by the UN Secretary-General in his annual reports on children and armed conflict to the Security Council. However, to date no progress has been achieved on the issue of access for monitoring and verification.⁵⁵

Despite security constraints, local and national NGOs have played a useful role in monitoring violations against children, particularly with regards to the issue of the detention of children under security legislation.⁵⁶ National NGOs have also conducted research and advocacy on the involvement of children in village defence militias in the south.⁵⁷ However, human rights organisations and other NGOs working on or in southern Thailand and local community groups engaged in monitoring children's rights in southern Thailand need support to increase their capacity to monitor, report, raise awareness and advocate for the rights of children.

International NGOs have tried to engage with armed groups in southern Thailand to influence their practices.

Council of Foreign Ministers in Djibouti, 15 – 17 November 2012. Thai NGOs, such as CrCF and Muslim Attorney Center have called for the revocation of both special laws enforced in the Deep South.

⁵⁰ An extension of the imposition of the Emergency Decree needs to be reviewed every three months and approved by the cabinet. In June 2014, the current military government also known as National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO), approved a three-month extension of the Emergency Decree in the three southernmost provinces, except Mae Lan district, for the 36th time since 2006. “ต่อพรก.3 เดือนคุมพื้นที่ 3 จว.ใต้”, *ข่าวสด*, 19 มิถุนายน 2557 [*Khao Sod*, “Emergency Decree extended in the three southernmost provinces”, 19 June 2014].

⁵¹ *Bangkok Post*, “Army wrests control of crisis”, 21 May 2014.

⁵² For an analysis on the peace dialogue in southern Thailand, see Duncan McCargo, *Southern Thailand: From Conflict to Negotiations?*, Lowy Institute for International Policy, April 2014.

⁵³ Although NCPO has agreed to continue with the Kuala Lumpur-facilitated peace dialogue, it brushed aside any possible discussions on autonomy claiming that Thailand is an “inseparable” unitary state. “วินชัยแจงปมพูดคุยสันติภาพ ยันรัฐไทยหนึ่งเดียวไม่มีปกครองพิเศษ,” สถาบันข่าวอิศรา, 24 มิถุนายน 2557 [*Isra News Agency*, “Winchai clarifies Thailand a unitary state, no special administrative region”, 24 June 2014].

⁵⁴ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, interview with 17-year-old Tohae Karim and his parents, Pattani, 1 November 2013. Karim was instructed by a court order to undergo a 20-day re-education program in November 2013.

⁵⁵ UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council, UN. Doc. A/68/878-S/2014/339, para. 2014, 15 May 2014.

⁵⁶ Child Soldiers International and CrCF, interview with Pornpen Khongkachonkiet, Director, Cross Cultural Foundation, Bangkok, 17 July, 2014.

⁵⁷ Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and Justice for Peace Foundation, *Priority to Protect: Preventing children's association with village defence militias in southern Thailand*, March 2011.

One tangible result is the PULO's announcement of a 15-point list of rules of engagement (ROE) in October 2012. The list includes refraining from attacking civilians; ensuring children have the aid and care required; and preventing violations of the laws of armed conflict by its own forces. These ROE are based on principles of both International Humanitarian Law and *shari'a* law.⁵⁸ PULO's military role in the conflict appears to be minimal compared to that of the BRN. Nevertheless, engagement with the BRN commanders on applicable norms, and particularly on the prohibition of child recruitment and use, could have a significant impact in changing the BRN's behaviour.

8. Obligations under international law

Armed groups have obligations under international law to prohibit and prevent the recruitment of children or their use in hostilities. It is widely accepted that non-state armed groups are bound by customary international humanitarian law applicable to non-international armed conflicts. The Thai government has denied the existence of an armed conflict.⁵⁹ But based on the intensity of the current hostilities and the existence of organised armed groups, such as the BRN, Child Soldiers International and CrCF believe that the situation in southern Thailand amounts to a non-international armed conflict. As such, armed groups active in southern Thailand are bound by rules of customary international humanitarian law applicable to non-international armed conflict, including prohibiting the recruitment of children and/or the use of children to take part in hostilities.⁶⁰

Thailand is also a party to OPAC which was drafted with the view to provide stronger protection against the recruitment and use of children in hostilities, building upon the then existing standards under international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The standard contained in OPAC, Article 4(1) prohibits armed groups from recruiting or using any person aged below 18 in hostilities under any circumstances. The UN Secretary-General applies the standards of Article 4(1) when assessing compliance with international law for armed groups active in states party to OPAC.⁶¹

The fact that under-age recruitment and use is carried out by armed groups does not exempt the Thai government from its obligations under applicable international law to protect children's rights. In particular, OPAC requires state parties to take all feasible measures to prevent the recruitment and use of under-18s by armed groups, including by criminalising such practices (Article 4, paragraph 2). OPAC also requires

⁵⁸ See "List of Core Principles of PULO's Engagement Rules" available at http://theirwords.org/media/transfer/doc/th_pulo_01-ea2ba13b6dc3c5a3b5d202f280ee6e1b.pdf.

⁵⁹ See Committee on the Rights of the Child 59th session, Reply to list of issues concerning additional and updated information related to the consideration of the initial report of Thailand, UN. Doc CRC/C/OPAC/THA/1, 20 January 2012.

⁶⁰ See International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Study on Customary International Humanitarian Law*. Rules available in the ICRC Customary IHL database: <http://www.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/home> [last accessed August 2014].

⁶¹ The UN Secretary-General's criteria to list armed groups that recruit or use children, in violation of international obligations applicable to them, reads as follow: "The conduct of *non-State armed groups* was assessed in accordance with the widely accepted minimum international standard that children under age 15 shall not be conscripted or enlisted into armed forces or groups or used by them to participate actively in hostilities in either international or internal armed conflicts. This standard echoes the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and the statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. *In States that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, non-State armed groups are held to that higher standard, prohibiting all recruitment and use of children under 18.* Commitments made in peace agreements or to my Special Representative were also taken into account." (*Italics added.*) Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. S/2002/1299, 26 November 2002, paragraph 31. In its 2010 report, the UN Secretary-General confirmed that the basis for listing or delisting parties that recruit or use children will remain the same, i.e. "in conformity with past practice and in line with applicable international law." See UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/64/742-S/2010/181, 13 April 2010, paragraph 177. Similarly in UN Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN Doc. A/66/782-S/2012/261, 26 April 2012, paragraph 231.

Thailand to “take all feasible measures to ensure that persons within their jurisdiction recruited or used in hostilities contrary to this Protocol are demobilised or otherwise released from service”; and, when necessary, to provide “these persons all appropriate assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration” (Article 6.3).

However, as noted by the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2012, Thailand has yet to explicitly criminalise the recruitment or use of children in hostilities, and to develop programs specifically designed to monitor and prevent child recruitment and to provide appropriate assistance for recovery and reintegration.⁶² In fact, as this report previously noted, the Thai government has yet to acknowledge the fact that under-18s have been recruited and used by armed groups.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

Armed groups have recruited children in southern Thailand for at least a decade. In the absence of comprehensive monitoring of grave violations against the rights of children in southern Thailand, no effective policies have been formulated to specifically address these issues.

Further research is needed to establish the scale and exact nature and scope of children’s involvement in armed groups and, on that basis, to establish and implement coordinated strategies to protect children against such involvement. Extensive consultations and coordination with local leaders and communities are needed in order to create effective strategies to protect children against recruitment as well as to ensure successful rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

While the peace process with the BRN is currently stalled, dialogue with the armed groups on the issue of under-age recruitment is key to bringing an end to this practice. Any future peace initiatives should ensure that the issue of under-age recruitment is embedded in future dialogue and agreements.

Recommendations to armed groups

- Immediately end the recruitment and use of children under the age of 18 years and release all under-18s within their ranks without fear of reprisal for the children and their families;
- Cease the targeting of children through indoctrination and training in schools and other locations;
- Publicly agree to abide by international standards to prohibit and prevent the recruitment and use of children;
- Issue and enforce orders to all militants to prohibit child recruitment and use;
- Widely disseminate the orders to members of the armed groups and to communities in areas where armed groups operate;
- Ensure that children do not take part in military operations;
- Remove from command positions those suspected of recruiting or using children;
- Allow access by the UN and other independent humanitarian organisations for the purpose of monitoring, identifying, releasing and reintegrating all children from their ranks;
- Seek assistance to facilitate the early implementation of effective procedures to uphold the prohibition of child recruitment and use;
- Comply with international humanitarian law, including by ceasing attacks against civilians, schools and all indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

Recommendations to the Thai Government

⁶² Committee on the Rights of the Child 59th session, Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Thailand’s initial report on OPAC, UN doc. CRC/C/OPAC/THA/CO/1, 21 February 2012. See also Security Council, Report of the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, UN doc. A/68/878 – S/2014/339, 15 May 2014.

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- Together with national and international child rights and child protection organisations, establish a system for monitoring and reporting on the recruitment and use of children by non-state armed groups and on the impacts of the conflict in southern Thailand on children, particularly on their psychology, health and education;
- On the basis of systematic data collection, develop multi-faceted, multi-agency strategies to alleviate the impacts of the conflict on children and prevent child recruitment and use by armed groups;
- Expressly criminalise the recruitment and use in hostilities of any persons under the age of 18 years in armed forces and armed groups;
- Ensure that civilian and military officials in southern Thailand are trained in children's rights, including the provisions of OPAC, and are aware of their roles to prevent and address underage recruitment;
- Together with national and international child rights and child protection organisations, disseminate and raise awareness of children's rights among communities in southern Thailand and facilitate the work of these organisations;
- Ensure that children are not arbitrarily detained nor prosecuted solely for the fact of having been recruited or used by armed groups;
- Amend Martial Law and the Emergency Decree to explicitly state that children under the age of 18 years cannot be detained under these laws. Children suspected of committing a security-related crime should be dealt with in accordance with the 2010 Juvenile and Family Court and Juvenile and Family Procedure Act;
- Ensure that the detention of under-18s is used as a last resort; that they are detained separately from adults; that they are not subjected to torture or other forms of inhuman treatment; that there is a clear regulation on permitting visits from family and relatives; and that they are allowed to have a legal advisor, a psychologist and other relevant parties present during the inquiry;
- Discuss measures to increase the protection of children and end the recruitment and use of the under-18s in hostilities with the BRN and other representatives of the Patani Malay liberation movement if and when the peace dialogue is resumed;
- Facilitate the work of the UN and other independent humanitarian organisations, by allowing access to the south for the purpose of monitoring reports of child recruitment and use, identifying, releasing and reintegrating children.

Recommendations to the UN country team

- Develop a coordinated strategy to monitor the risk of underage recruitment and other grave violations against children in southern Thailand;
- Proactively engage in a dialogue with the Thai government to advise and support initiatives aimed at preventing and remedying the recruitment and use of children;
- Proactively engage in a dialogue with armed groups to explore ways to verify and release children associated with them;
- Support national non-governmental organisations and civil society to protect and raise awareness of the rights of children in southern Thailand, including protection from child recruitment and use.

Recommendations to the international community

- Support the Thai government to implement its commitments under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict;
- Encourage and support initiatives by the Thai government to end the recruitment and use of children by armed groups and support their rehabilitation and reintegration;
- Support NGOs and civil society groups working on the issues of child protection, child rights, and the eradication of the use of under-18s by armed groups.

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