

MDRP Open Letter to Amnesty International

N&N no. 20 – October 18, 2006

On October 11, Amnesty International issued a press release entitled, “*Democratic Republic of Congo: Child soldiers abandoned,*” announcing the release of their new report called, “*DRC: Children at War, Creating Hope for the Future.*” The following is an open letter from MDRP to Amnesty International commenting on the report findings and inviting further discussion between Amnesty International and the MDRP Secretariat concerning the issues raised in the document.



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October 16, 2006

Ms. Irene Zubaida Khan
Secretary General
Amnesty International Secretariat
1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW
UNITED KINGDOM

Dear Ms. Khan:

Subject: AI study on children associated with armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo

We read with interest your recently released report on children associated with armed forces (CAAF) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *DRC: Children at war, creating hope for the future*. We appreciate that the piece has drawn attention to the important issue of children in armed forces, particularly girls, and look forward to discussing your findings. We would, however, like to comment on a few points made in the report.

First, we would like to make very clear that demobilization centers in the DRC have not closed due to lack of funding, but rather as part of a pre-planned strategy, to which the *Commission Nationale de Désarmement, Démobilisation et Réinsertion* (CONADER) and the *Structure Militaire Intégrée* (SMI) had agreed in May 2006. The rationale was that the number of troops remaining to be processed in these camps was very low. Indeed, half of the centers had been empty for some time upon closing, and were costing the project approximately \$150,000 per month. More cost-effective mobile teams have

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subsequently been deployed by the joint operations center (CCOC) under the joint management of CONADER and the SMI. Moreover, contrary to the concerns expressed in your report, the closings will not adversely affect ongoing or future efforts to assist CAAF; children released from armed groups do not stay in demobilization centers, but move directly to transit centers run by child protection agencies.

Second, while we fully acknowledge that CONADER is a new government agency requiring further support and capacity-building, it is important to point out that the DRC's CAAF programs have been implemented by international and national NGOs outside the purview of CONADER. Four special projects have supported six experienced child protection agencies in the DRC (Belgian Red Cross, CARE International, International Rescue Committee, International Foundation for Education and Self-Help, Save the Children UK and UNICEF) with direct funding from MDRP and under the supervision of UNICEF.

And third, we would like to comment on MDRP's capacities. MDRP was never conceived to carry out long-term reintegration and community development. As your report notes, we support demobilization and reintegration (D&R) as *transitional* processes that can help move nations from a post-conflict to a development state. This being the case, we strongly encourage national governments, in partnership with NGOs and the international community, to establish strategies concerning sustainable development following disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).

These issues aside, we do appreciate that your report raises many important concerns and questions concerning CAAF in the DRC. *First*, linkages to security sector reform (SSR) can be central to the success of a DDR operation, as has been the case in the DRC. However, in the DRC the army integration process has been managed by the SMI, and is thus outside the control of MDRP or CONADER. Recognizing this shortcoming, we are looking for ways to further strengthen SSR-DDR linkages in our programs. *Second*, we do agree that the international community and national development partners need to do more to address the needs of CAAF, especially of girls. Under the Lusaka Peace Accords, MDRP can only provide demobilization and reintegration assistance to members of those groups that were accord signatories. Rebel groups formed afterwards – and children associated with them – are therefore not eligible under the program. A clear strategy is necessary to ensure these children are not left behind. Well conceived strategies are also needed for regions such as Ituri and Katanga, in order to avoid perverse incentives for other groups to mobilize.

Again, we sincerely thank you for your work, which is an important contribution to the central issue of CAAF. Please do contact us if you require further clarification or if you have questions in the future on demobilization and reintegration in the Great Lakes Region. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Maria Correia
Manager, Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program
The World Bank

For more information on MDRP, please visit www.mdrp.org or contact Bruno Donat, Communications Officer, MDRP Secretariat, World Bank at info@mdrp.org.