

Attribution & the Karuna Split — Child Recruitment, by Faction

Citation-only re-reading of child-recruitment allegations in Sri Lanka's North-East, separated by year, district, controlling force, and command structure across the 3 March 2004 Karuna split. The label "LTTE recruited child soldiers" is too broad unless the case, the date, and the responsible faction are identified. Children were victims first.

From the same UN and HRW record, four distinct categories emerge: (a) the LTTE Vanni central command; (b) the Eastern LTTE under Karuna pre-3 March 2004; (c) the Karuna group / TMVP after the split; and (d) alleged state complicity or failure-to-prevent. UNSG CAAC reports under UNSCR 1612 (2005) listed the LTTE and the Karuna faction as separate parties in Annex II of every global SG CAAC report from S/2006/826 onward. This dossier holds those distinctions open.

§1 Why attribution, not denial

The point is not whether child recruitment happened — every credible source confirms it did, and the children were victims first. The point is whether responsibility has been assigned correctly. The Sri Lankan civil war produced at least four distinct armed actors recruiting or alleged to have recruited children in the North-East between 2002 and 2009: the LTTE under Vanni central command; the LTTE Eastern command under Karuna until the 3 March 2004 split; the Karuna group / TMVP after the split; and Sri Lankan state forces or state-aligned paramilitaries operating in government-controlled areas. The UN Secretary-General's Children and Armed Conflict reports treat the LTTE and the Karuna faction / TMVP as legally distinct parties throughout (Annex II of A/61/529–S/2006/826, A/62/609–S/2007/757, A/63/785–S/2009/158).

§2 The Karuna split — chronology

3 March 2004 — Karuna held a press conference at the Theenagam secretariat in Karadiyanaaru, Batticaloa, declaring independence for the Eastern Tigers from the Vanni-based LTTE leadership (D.B.S. Jeyaraj, 11 Apr 2014).

25 March 2004 — the LTTE issued a public ultimatum: "to safeguard our nation and people it has been decided to get rid of Karuna from our soil."

9–11 April 2004 — LTTE forces loyal to the Vanni HQ militarily defeated the Karuna revolt. Approximately 2,000 child soldiers under Karuna "fled or were encouraged by their commanders to return to their families" (HRW, *Living in Fear*, Nov 2004). By early August 2004, UNICEF had registered 1,800 such returned children, primarily in Batticaloa.

§3 The legal standard, by year

Additional Protocols 1977 — under-15 prohibition (customary IHL). CRC 1989 / in force 1990 — under-15. Rome Statute 1998 / in force 2002, Art 8(2)(e)(vii) — conscripting, enlisting or using children under 15 in non-international armed conflict is a war crime, applicable to armed forces or groups. OP-CAC 2000 / in force 12 Feb 2002, Art 4 — non-state armed groups "shall not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18." Sri Lanka deposited its declaration under Art 3(2) on 8 September 2000, one of the earliest ratifying States. UNSC Resolution 1612 (2005) established the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism that produced the four country-specific SG reports on Sri Lanka. Paris Principles 2007 §2.1 widened the operational definition of "child associated with an armed force or armed group" to include any role.

§4 What the published figures say — by source, by faction

HRW Living in Fear (Nov 2004), citing UNICEF: 4,600 cumulative cases of under-age recruitment by the LTTE between January 2002 and 1 November 2004, with "the largest number taking place in Batticaloa district in the East." Some 2,000 child soldiers under Karuna returned home at the April 2004 split.

UNSG S/2006/1006 (20 Dec 2006): 5,794 cumulative LTTE cases on the UNICEF database since April 2001; 164 new Karuna-faction cases as of 31 October 2006. The Karuna faction is listed as a distinct party throughout.

UNSG S/2007/758 (21 Dec 2007): 262 LTTE recruitments (Nov 2006–Aug 2007) — down from 756 — versus 207 TMVP/Karuna-faction recruitments — up from 193. 78% of TMVP cases from Batticaloa. The Secretary-General explicitly called for investigation of "allegations that elements of the Government security forces are supporting the forced recruitment of children by the TMVP/Karuna faction."

HRW Complicit in Crime (24 Jan 2007): in calendar 2006, 208 children abducted by the Karuna group across Ampara (23), Batticaloa (181), Trincomalee (4) — UNICEF estimated the true figure was approximately three times higher. TMVP party offices in Batticaloa town, Akkaraipattu (STF) and Trincomalee (navy) were guarded by Sri Lankan security forces while abducted children were held on the premises. "Transporting several hundred abducted youth to the Karuna camps would have been impossible without the complicity of government security forces."

UNSG S/2009/325 (25 Jun 2009): under access constraints, 39 LTTE recruitments verified Sept 2007–Jan 2009, with "grave concerns that, in the last months, LTTE has forcibly recruited a much larger number of children, allegedly some as young as 14 years of age." 150 TMVP recruitment/re-recruitment reports in the same period; 77% Batticaloa.

UN Panel of Experts on Accountability (Darusman, 31 Mar 2011): in the final stages of the war (Sept 2008–May 2009), the LTTE "greatly intensified its recruitment of people of all ages, including children as young as fourteen"; "forced recruitment of children" is listed among six core LTTE credible-allegation categories.

§5 On naming

This dossier names Karuna (Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan), Pillayan (Sivanesathurai Chandrakanthan) and Velupillai Prabhakaran because UN SG CAAC reports, UN PoE 2011, OISL 2015, Sri Lankan court proceedings (Pararajasingham indictment), and UK Crown Court records (Karuna's 25 January 2008 conviction in London for using a Sri Lankan diplomatic passport issued in a false name) have already named them publicly. No other commander is named. No child, family member, school, or village is named anywhere in this archive.

§6 A hypothesis, not a finding

After the 3 March 2004 split, Karuna group / TMVP recruitment allegations in the Eastern Province were politically useful to the Sri Lankan state and to TMVP because they damaged the LTTE's international image while simultaneously weakening Vanni-loyal LTTE influence in the East. This is a hypothesis — a description of motive, opportunity, and documented post-split conduct. It is not a LTTE finding.

This hypothesis would be falsified by: (a) an internal LTTE Vanni-command order directing post-2004 Eastern recruitment; (b) UNSG CAAC annexes showing zero post-split Karuna/TMVP recruitment listings; (c) a credible Sri Lankan court finding that no state complicity existed; (d) any contemporaneous communication showing intent specifically to frame the LTTE. Until such evidence is in the public domain, LTTE describes the Karuna group / TMVP as having had motive, opportunity, and documented post-split recruitment — and refuses the stronger framing.

§7 Why this matters for the ledger

If the LTTE label is loaded onto every Tamil-coded child-recruitment case in the 1983–2009 period — including those by the Karuna group and TMVP after the March 2004 split, and those occurring with documented state-force complicity — the actual command-responsibility map is obliterated, both for the LTTE and for the Sri Lankan state. Honest record-keeping (and any future judicial process under Rome Statute Art 28 / JCE doctrine) requires the distinctions kept above. Children were victims first. The point is to identify the correct responsible actors, never to minimise the suffering.

Sources

- HRW · Living in Fear (Nov 2004) — child soldiers and the LTTE.
- HRW · Complicit in Crime (Jan 2007) — state collusion with the Karuna group.
- HRW · Recurring Nightmare (Mar 2008).
- UNSG · S/2006/1006 — children and armed conflict in Sri Lanka (Dec 2006).
- UNSG · S/2007/758 (Dec 2007).
- UNSG · S/2009/325 (Jun 2009).
- UN Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005) — MRM.
- UN Panel of Experts on Accountability (Darusman, 2011).
- OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka — A/HRC/30/CRP.2 (Sep 2015).
- Rome Statute Art 8(2)(e)(vii) — war crime in non-international armed conflict.
- Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OP-CAC), Art 4.
- Paris Principles 2007 — §2.1 definition.
- UNICEF–LTTE Action Plan development (Kilinochchi, 4 Mar 2003).
- GoSL–TMVP–UNICEF Tripartite Action Plan (1 Dec 2008).
- ICG Asia Report N°159 — Sri Lanka's Eastern Province (Oct 2008).
- Jo Becker — Child Recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal (Ford Institute, 2007).
- Paul Staniland — Networks of Rebellion (Cornell, 2014), Ch. 6.
- BBC News — Karuna UK Crown Court conviction (25 Jan 2008).
- Batticaloa High Court — Pararajasingham indictment / acquittal (Oct 2017 / 13 Jan 2021).
- D.B.S. Jeyaraj — Karuna split chronology (Daily FT / dbsjeyaraj.com, 11 Apr 2014).
- UTHR(J) — University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna · Information Bulletins 37–40.
- Rome Statute Art 28 — command responsibility frame.

What this is not

- This dossier does not deny that child recruitment occurred. Children were victims first.
- This dossier does not name a single child, family member, school, or village.
- This dossier does not name any commander beyond those already publicly named by UN bodies and courts of competent jurisdiction (Karuna, Pillayan, Prabhakaran).
- This dossier does not aggregate counts in LTTE voice — every figure is attributed verbatim to its publishing source.
- This dossier does not accept intake — families and former child recruits route to UNICEF Sri Lanka, OHCHR, ITJP, PEARL, OMP, UN WGEID, and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.
- This dossier does not glorify any armed group (UK Terrorism Act 2000 §12) — LTTE, Karuna group, TMVP, EPDP, PLOTE, TELO, EROS, or state-backed paramilitary.

- This dossier does not assert that Karuna deliberately recruited children to frame the LTTE — that is a published hypothesis with explicit falsifiers, not a finding.