**In Pakistan, UN Plays Politics with Children and Armed Conflict, Soft on Human Rights**

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UNITED NATIONS, July 8 -- In Pakistan, where the UN has positioned itself as a friend of government, careful not to comment on human rights but rather build government's capacity, the UN is also underplaying the problem of children and armed conflict.

That the Taliban recruit, and in cases abduct or buy, children as fighters or even suicide bombers or assassins is well known. But Pakistan is not on the UN's list of countries with children in armed conflict. Why not?

The UN has played along with Pakistan's fiction that there is no armed conflict inside its borders, despite massive army sweeps through the tribal areas, displacing millions. Whereas elsewhere it is called a Post Conflict Needs Assessment, in Pakistan the UN helpfully calls it a Post Crisis Needs Assessment.

Linguistic gymnastics are one thing. But to fail to act on children and armed conflict to placate a government is something else, particularly when there are double standards. As Inner City Press has previously reported, Colombia disputes being listed in Annex II of the UN's Report on Children and Armed Conflict.

Inner City Press has sought an explanation about Colombia, and now about Pakistan, from the head of that office, without receiving a substantive response.

At the UN noon briefing on July 8, Inner City Press asked:

Inner City Press: many people are saying that in Pakistan there are many children either adopted or used by the Taliban and even some local pro-Government militias. But it’s not on Annex II of the Secretary-General’s report on children and armed conflict. I’m wondering, does putting a country on that agenda, on that annex — Colombia is on it, the Philippines is on it, Sri Lanka is on it — does it require the consent of the Government or does the Secretary-General and Ms. [Radhika] Coomaraswamy determine that children are being recruited and put them on?

Associate Spokesperson Farhan Haq: I believe that’s a determination that’s made by Radhika Coomaraswamy in her role as the Special Representative dealing with that topic.

Inner City Press: And she is free to put a country on without its consent?

Associate Spokesperson: I believe it’s her determination how to do it.

Inner City Press: Does the Secretary-General think that Pakistan should be on the list given the UN’s own knowledge of children and armed conflict?

Associate Spokesperson: The views of the Special Representative, Radhika Coomaraswamy, are the ones that count for this.

And so later on Thursday, Inner City Press sent Ms. Coomaraswamy written questions, as it has done in the past. But this time, her answers were curt and non-substantive. Why?

The questions:

...there are definite children and armed conflict issues in Pakistan, among the Taliban and also some local, quasi-governmental militias... I ask you for comment:

do you agree these issues exist in Pakistan?

why didn't Pakistan on Annex 2?

are you thinking of putting Pakistan on Annex 2?

Separately, what do you make of Colombia's opposition to your Office seeking an action plan with the FARC [and to] a statement you made in Mexico recently, about Colombia-- What's your response?

...your thoughts on the events at UN House in Colombo, led by government minister Wimal Weerawansa and supported from higher up.

There were no substantive answers, except a notation that Colombia's complaint involves a question raised in Geneva. But what of Pakistan? If we ever get answers to these questions we will report them. Watch this site.