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INDIA

Report: There Are 3,000 Child Soldiers in India

By Nilanjana Bhowmick / New Delhi | May 15, 2013 | [Add a Comment](#)

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Last year, suspected insurgents in northeast India's Manipur state abducted three teenage boys. Despite a missing-persons complaint and a police search, they were never found. In Manipur, as well as several other Indian states, it is not uncommon for children to be kidnapped by insurgent groups to be turned into child soldiers. Indeed, around the same time as the boys went missing, five teenage girls laid down arms in front of police in the eastern Indian state of Orissa, a stronghold of Maoist rebels. They had been kidnapped from their village in 2008.



BISWARANJAN ROUT / AP

Children play a cricket match on the banks of a river near Odagaon in Nayagarh district, Orissa state, India, on Dec. 8, 2011

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Stories like these have been circulating for years, but officials have largely chosen to ignore or downplay the problem. A new study may shake them out of silence: a [report](#) released last week by the New Delhi-based Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) found that there are currently as many as 3,000 child soldiers in India. "The recruitment of child soldiers is rampant, and hundreds of children remain involved in the conflicts," the report says.

The ACHR findings suggest that the problem is particularly severe in India's long-running Maoist insurgency, but that children have also been recruited by insurgent groups in Jammu and Kashmir and parts of northeast India like Manipur, where separatist groups have clashed with Indian forces for decades. "In certain areas in eastern India, it is mandatory for families to give at least one of their children to Maoist rebels," says Suhas Chakma, director of the ACHR.

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And yet, the country seems loath to face, let alone address, the problem. India ratified a U.N. Optional Protocol on children in armed conflict in 2005. As of March, a total 197 out of 640 Indian districts are affected by insurgency, according to the report. In 2011, the Indian government submitted its first [Periodic Report](#) on the status of implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. The document, prepared by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, was devoid of any factual information on child soldiers. The Indian government denied the existence of any armed conflict in India, saying "India does not face either international or noninternational armed-conflict situations," therefore there is no question of involvement of children in it. "The Indian government's reaction is embarrassing," says Chakma. "They don't want to acknowledge the problem because they don't want international monitoring groups in the country."

The ACHR report, submitted last Thursday to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, recommends government-sponsored rehabilitation schemes for these children and a need for greater awareness. It also asked the National Human Rights Commission to intervene to help address the issue. New Delhi can start by admitting there's a problem.

[\(MORE: India Must Do More to Prevent Child Sex Abuse, Report Says\)](#)

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