Subsequent to our Bulletin 26 on child conscription in the East, there were news reports on the subject and a press release from AI. This bulletin updates the earlier one and elucidates how little the LTTE has been constrained by the publicity. We underscore the predicament of children in the rural East and the powerlessness of parents. At present the international community is preoccupied with what the powers-that-be have dubbed a "war on terrorism" and its tragic fallout. The local media and political establishment are playing out their power games with callous disregard for the gaping pitfalls just ahead. The ongoing tragedy in a corner of this island would tend to be therefore passed by with indifference. Being mindful of this, and yet knowing the trauma of the families concerned, and their desperate entreaties, we feel impelled to publish this update. We trust that these victims would be given a hearing, at least by those who understand the gravity of phenomena involving child soldiers. Their outgrowth, we well know, cannot be confined to a time and place.

0. Beyond Grief and Beyond Justice

The trauma of events speaks louder than words. Before we go into other ramifications, we give a few detailed examples among thousands. These illustrate the tragedy of families wrenched asunder by criminal demands on them and their children.

Kumar, is the 11-year-old son of Mr. & Mrs. Kanthan of Ammanthaveli, North Vaharai. Kumar, the youngest, has an elder sister and two elder brothers. The latter are in Sammnathurai to the south, working in a rice mill. After the LTTE started its forced recruitment, it detained the father and mother in a labour camp, expecting the two elder boys to return. After 15 days, this ploy having failed, the LTTE released the parents and took Kanthan for military training. The parents were forced to sign a letter forfeiting their house, rice field, fishing boat, cart and bull. The letter further started that they would never again set foot in Tamil Eelam (the North-East).

Vathani, a girl of 13, is the youngest of 8 children in the Ponnambalam family from Mudalaikudah. The LTTE demanded a child and made it clear that a refusal would lead to the confiscation of their home and fields, and the family of 10 thrown on the streets. The eldest, a boy, volunteered to go. The others stopped him. In desperation they clutched at what seemed a
faint ray of hope. They figured that if Vathani went, she would soon be discharged as being under age. Vathani agreed to go along with this plan.

Mr. & Mrs. Ponnambalam took Vathani to the LTTE office in Kokkadichcholai on the evening of 8th October. They were given a letter and asked to take Vathani to an LTTE camp in Manalpiddy. The parents were made to recite words of mockery that they were giving their daughter to the cause 'wholeheartedly' ('manapoovamaha'), and a video was taken of this 'voluntary' submission.

The parents went to the same camp at 10.00 AM the following day (9th Oct.) to see Vathani. Vathani, who earlier had no inkling of the trauma of leaving her parents and going into a military environment, broke down crying on seeing them. Between spasms of anguish, she asked to be taken home. However, the parents returned without her, the flower of their life plucked away.

Sivaruban is the 10-year-old son of Mrs. Thirunavukkarasu, a widow from Vaharai. He has an elder sister aged 16. The three of them came to stay with relatives in Vinayagapuram, Valaichenai. This, the mother did for the protection of the children, when the LTTE started its forced recruitment. Though an army-controlled area, the LTTE came there on 15th September and took Sivaruban away by force. The mother screamed, and the sister took poison and was warded for some days at Valaichenai Hospital. The mother returned home to Vaharai with her daughter, her mission having been thwarted.

Rajabahu, aged 14, the eldest son of the Rajadurais, is from a poor family in Karadian Aru. The LTTE demanded Rajabahu on pain of expropriation and expulsion. The boy accepted his fate unwillingly. Before he went, he asked his mother for a treat and a bottle of aerated water, a luxury in the uncleared area. The mother prepared the parting meal, and the precious bottle of aerated water was placed before the son. In a fit of frustration, Rajabahu smashed the bottle.

The parents then took their son to the LTTE, and made their recital of 'wholehearted giving' before a video camera. These videos will be shown to Tamil audiences abroad as an illustration of the patriotic fervour of Batticaloa parents and children. A sense of guilt in preserving their own children in flourishing circumstances in the West, would no doubt loosen purse strings.

Thevaruban is the 10-year-old son of Mr. & Mrs. Nallaratnam of Kathiraveli, Vaharai. He has an elder sister who is married. The LTTE demanded his elder brother for military service. This brother being in Colombo, the LTTE took Thevaruban as a hostage, saying that they would release him when his elder brother comes home. Some time later, the Nallaratnams went and remonstrated with the LTTE, demanding Thevaruban back, as he is barely a weaned child. The LTTE refused, saying that they have given him training and will release him only after the liberation struggle is concluded.

Nalinikanth, a boy of 14, is a son of the widow, Mrs. Kalalan, of Kalimadu, Kannankudah. Owing to their poverty, the boy had dropped out of school. The LTTE recently came home and took the boy away forcibly. His mother screamed and fainted.

In all the Batticaloa homes above, a funereal air has been overlaid by a sense of guilt over their children. Life has continued in a desultory, abnormal fashion, with cooking done irregularly and consumed indifferently. In the next example we have suppressed some details for reasons that would become evident.

Kanthan, who just reached 14, is from Kokkadichcholai. He is the second of 3 children, the
go and his parents too kept him hidden. The LTTE came and locked their home and told the parents that they would not be allowed in until the boy is handed over. On 8th October, the heart broken parents sent the boy with a close relative, Ratnam.

Having obtained a letter from the local LTTE office, they were directed to a centre in Manalpiddy. There the child recruits and their parents were asked to get into a bus to be taken to another place. It was getting dark and the bus had to move slowly along the rutted road. At a bend, Ratnam asked Kanthan to get down and run for it. This was not observed by the LTTE. Kanthan found his way and was hidden by relatives. The next night, a female relative smuggled him out of the LTTE controlled area and he is safe for now.

Oblivious to these appalling events affecting their children, sections of the well-heeled Tamil elite were indulging in strange rituals. The National Peace Council along with two other groups arranged a plush three-day consultation at a hotel in Nilaveli. Several Western diplomats were also present at this conference in early October 2001 that was funded by a Japanese foundation. The decisions at the conference were to serve as a basis for approaching both the Government and the LTTE.

The Sinhalese delegates were silenced by an appeal to their guilt. Through carefully selected speakers, the organisers set the tone. The main message was that the Tamil people are inseparable from the LTTE and this war is to relieve the oppression of the Tamil people by the Government. Some of the supposedly rural Tamil NPC animators were paraded as those who could show the delegates the Tamils in the ‘uncleared’ (i.e. LTTE-controlled) area, if they wished. Away from stage settings, however, the reality is too often ironical.

Thirty miles south, in Vaharai, large numbers of Tamils in the uncleared area were moving towards the lines of the Sri Lankan Army, to protect their children from the LTTE. The LTTE has once more distinguished itself among liberation movements by transforming oppressive state forces into saviours of the oppressed.

The LTTE thus, while on the one hand going for massive forcible recruitment of children, which has a vicious, unstoppable dynamism of its own, is using all channels of influence to replace the PA government by a UNP one. With Parliament dissolved and elections in prospect, the UNP, with help from the TULF (that is now allied to the UNP), will be pushed as the party of peace. Both the LTTE and UNP are clear that this convergence of interests is only temporary.

A group of well-connected Tamil journalists is among those active in organising a front of Tamil parties amenable to the LTTE. After the elections, the bargaining power of these front-parties will be used to push for a cease-fire, where rhetoric will substitute for the scantiest guarantees of permanence. The Tamil parties, and particularly the TULF, know well that this would be the cue for the LTTE to extend recruitment of children to urban areas under army control. In this game, Tamil children face the long prospect of untold savagery, shielded by a conspiracy of silence.

Further cases illustrating the LTTE's recruitment drive are given in the Appendix. Local observers place the proportion of minors (under 18s) among the recruits at above 60%. The youngest in the list are in the age group of 10-11. It is observed that they are from the poorest areas and were invariably taken forcibly.

1. Batticaloa: Throwing Away the Velvet Glove

In the wake of resistance, by September end, the pretence of a veneer of legality in child-
and trailer stopped opposite homes. The parents were called out and asked to give a child. When they refused, they were beaten with *panaimattais* (dry stems of Palmyrah fronds having abrasive edges). Usually the children came running on hearing the parents scream. The recruiters then asked a child to come along. The child on declining was beaten and forced into the trailer. The use of this method on a larger scale is suggested by testimony of its use also in Karadiyan Aru. The LTTE's current mood is reflected in the leaflet distributed in Valaichenai (see Sec.5 below).

In Vaharai, LTTE recruiters, including an area leader, were assaulted by parents. According to reports from the area, about 20 civilians were detained in a round up by the LTTE. In this move to make up numbers, children of delicate health become early casualties. A mother from Keluthimadu was imprisoned by the LTTE for not handing over a child. In the night she was witness to a newly recruited child of 14 succumbing to an attack of asthma. The body was handed over to the angry parents the next day.

Among those punished by the confiscation of their properties for refusing to hand over a child, are Nadesan Overseer, Mr. Sundaramoorthy, and the local Notary Public, all three of them from Pankudaveli. Sundaramoorthy was held in custody by the LTTE and his losses include cows worth Rs.15 lakhs. The Notary's wife was detained for two days. A new board displayed at each one of their houses reads 'THIS IS THE PROPERTY OF THE LIBERATION TIGERS OF TAMIL EELAM. UNAUTHORISED ENTRY IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED'. In what follows we examine the new trends and issues.

2. Vaharai : The Writing on the Wall

In conducting its ongoing forced recruitment of minors in the Batticaloa District, the LTTE was moving area by area, making a clean sweep as it were. During the last days of September the LTTE had intensified its campaign in Vaharai. But there were neighbouring villages where this activity had not taken place, but the writing was literally on the wall. The schools had on their notice board unsigned cyclostyled notices that had also been widely distributed. The gist of the notices is as follows:

"The Leader is of the opinion that this war should not be prolonged. It must be brought to an end soon so that the coming generations of our people could live in dignity. We must defeat the Sinhalese armed forces that have committed aggression against our soil.

"We now have the requisite weaponry, but it is fighters that we lack. We feel that each family should contribute one member towards the fulfilment of our aim.

Everyone knew that this was an official LTTE notice. The emphasis was on each family contributing one member at least. Age was not talked about and in practice is not an issue. The LTTE had already informed people verbally that those who had sent their children to the army-controlled area must bring them back or lose their property. The dumbfounded parents wanted to make their complaint heard abroad, but felt utterly helpless. A mother of four girls, for instance, who had sent the two elder ones to Valaichenai, was terrified at the thought of bringing them back, but felt she may have no choice.

On 15th June this year, 35 Christian families professing pacifist convictions were expelled from Pannichankerni, in violence orchestrated by the LTTE. The incident in the village south of Vaharai was widely misrepresented as a clash between Hindus and Christians. What lay behind the incident became clear in the coming weeks. On 26th September, 103 days after the Christians were expelled, a similar number of Hindu families from the same village arrived at the army