

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

Dili, 29 October 2002

SPECIAL PANEL SENTENCES MILITIA COMMANDER

The Special Panel for Serious Crimes today sentenced Joni França, a former commander of Kaer Merah Mutin Putih militia in Lolotoe, Bobonaro District, to five years imprisonment. The sentencing follows his plea of guilty and conviction for five crimes against humanity (four counts imprisonment, one count torture) arising from his activities in Lolotoe between May and July 1999.

The sentence was below that recommended by the prosecution however both sides have indicated that they will not appeal the Court's decision.

França had originally been charged with two other crimes against humanity. They were both withdrawn by the prosecution in light of his guilty pleas to the above five counts. The 20 months França has already spent in pre-trial detention will be deducted from the sentence. The trial of two other militia members accused of crimes against humanity in Lolotoe in 1999 continues.

HIV/AIDS AWARENESS TRAINING BEGINS FOR ALL UNMISSET STAFF

The UNMISSET mission has begun comprehensive HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention Training for all UN international civilian staff, police and Peacekeepers serving in Timor-Leste.

The one-hour training sessions, which are mandatory for all UN staff, aim to increase understanding about the means of transmission of HIV/AIDS and ways to prevent the infection. They also enable participants to assess their own personal risk levels for attracting the disease.

During the coming weeks, 693 UN international civilian staff, including UN volunteers, 773 UN Police and 4,613 Peacekeeping troops will participate in training sessions. Training for nearly 800 UN local staff is expected to begin in late November.

All UN missions around the world are mandated to conduct HIV/AIDS Awareness Training pursuant to a UN Resolution 1308, which was passed on 17 July 2000.



By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

SRSR VISITS LIQUIÇA DISTRICT

The Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSR) Kamallesh Sharma visited Liquiça District today where he held meetings with the District Administrator Aurora Zimene and with community leaders.

Mr. Sharma also received a briefing from the UN Police (UNPOL) District Commander, Osby Karl Clark, and observed a training session of the Timor-Leste Police Service (TLPS), including specialised training conducted by UNMISSET's Human Rights Unit. Responsibility for law enforcement in Liquiça District is scheduled to be turned over completely by UNPOL to the TLPS in March 2003.

The SRSR later visited the site of the Liquiça Church massacre and received a briefing from UNMISSET's Special Crimes Unit regarding progress being made on the investigations. Mr. Sharma told Liquiça residents today that "the massacre is one of the priority cases for the Serious Crime Unit" and that he is "hopeful that those responsible for the crimes committed on 6 April 1999 will be brought to justice."

He also met with a cooperative of women's groups supporting the widows of the Liquiça massacre.

Mr. Sharma met as well with the regional commissioner of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation. Liquiça is one of the districts in Timor Leste that has received the highest number of returning citizens from West Timor. In August of this year, the first Community Reconciliation Processes were facilitated by the Reception, Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Maumeta Village, Liquiça District.

UNICEF URGES AN END TO THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) has released a new study in Bangkok, Thailand, that calls for the demobilization of child soldiers and their reintegration into normal society.

"Adult Wars, Child Soldiers: Voices of Children Involved in Armed Conflict in the East Asia and Pacific Region" states that 300,000 child soldiers are estimated to be currently serving throughout the world. Up to a quarter of them are in the East Asia and Pacific Region, according to the study.

UNICEF's Executive Director, Carol Bellamy, said in releasing the study that the use of children as soldiers by government and non-state armies is "an illegal and morally reprehensible practice that has no place in civilised societies".

Bellamy said the new UNICEF study and other research carried out in recent years in East Asia "has clearly shown that thousands of children are still being recruited "often by force " into state- and non-state armies in the region".



MEDIA BRIEFING NOTE

By UNMISSET Spokesperson's Office

The UNICEF study is based on interviews with 69 current and former child combatants from Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Myanmar, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. The average recruitment age of those interviewed was 13 years, while the youngest soldier interviewed was forcibly recruited at the age of seven.

"The voices of these children," declared the UNICEF Executive Director, "constitute a cry for help on behalf of all child soldiers, a cry that we cannot afford to ignore".

Those interviewed for the study reported numerous abuses, including brutal training regimens, hard labour and severe punishments while serving in armed groups. Some said they had been forced to witness or commit atrocities, including rape and murder, while others spoke of seeing friends and family killed.

The study urges that child soldiers as they are reintegrated into society be provided access to education and vocational training and to appropriate psychosocial care. However, the study also notes that little is currently being done in the East Asia and Pacific region to address the psychosocial needs of such children, even in post-conflict situations.

The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) set the legal minimum age for military recruitment at 15. However an Optional Protocol to the CRC was adopted which addresses armed conflict. It outlaws the involvement of any child under the age of 18 in hostilities. It also sets strict standards for the recruitment of anyone under that age. The Optional Protocol entered into force in February 2002 but must be ratified by individual countries. Thus far, in East Asia and the Pacific region, only the Philippines and Vietnam have ratified it, and Cambodia and Mongolia are now in the process of ratification.

UNICEF's Executive Director Bellamy urged countries to quickly ratifying and implement the Optional Protocol, saying it "is a crucial first step to ending the recruitment of children for armed combat and their use as soldiers".

