

---

# THAILAND

---

## Kingdom of Thailand

**Population:** 64.2 million (18.5 million under 18)

**Government armed forces:** 306,600

**Compulsory recruitment age:** 20

**Voluntary recruitment age:** 18

**Voting age:** 18

**Optional Protocol:** acceded 27 February 2006

**Other treaties ratified (see glossary):**

CRC, ILO 138, ILO 182

*There were no reports of under-18s in the armed forces. Children were reported to be involved with armed separatist groups in the south. Refugees from Myanmar included former child soldiers recruited by the Myanmar armed forces and armed political groups.*

---

## Context

Violence in the four mainly Muslim southern provinces escalated steadily; over 2,000 people had been killed there since 2004. Armed groups bombed, beheaded or shot Muslim and Buddhist civilians, including monks and teachers. Human rights violations committed by the authorities included the deaths of scores of people, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention.<sup>1</sup>

In September 2006 Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra was deposed in a bloodless military coup. Coup leaders abrogated the 1997 constitution and issued decrees instituting martial law.<sup>2</sup> A new constitution was endorsed in a referendum in August 2007.

---

## Government

### National recruitment legislation and practice

Article 71 of the 2007 constitution states that “Every person has a duty to defend the country.”

The 1954 Military Service Act provided the legal basis for conscription, requiring that every Thai man who had attained the age of 20 would be recruited into the armed forces;<sup>3</sup> an estimated 80,000 troops in the Thai military were conscripts.<sup>4</sup> The age of voluntary recruitment was 18.<sup>5</sup> The age for participation in hostilities was not stipulated in law.<sup>6</sup>

In February 2006 Thailand acceded to the Optional Protocol, stating in its declaration that military service was compulsory by law and that Thai men reaching the age of 18 had a duty to register on the inactive military personnel list. However, the age given for compulsory recruitment in the declaration appeared to be

at variance with the 1954 law cited above. The declaration states, “At the age of 21, selected inactive military personnel will become active military personnel. Inactive military personnel may also voluntarily apply to become active military personnel to serve in the national armed forces. Women are exempt from compulsory military service both in times of peace and in times of war, but are subjected to other duties assigned by law. In times of war or national crisis, inactive military personnel (men aged over 18) may be recruited to participate in the armed forces.”<sup>7</sup>

### Military training and military schools

The Armed Forces Academies Preparatory School offered secondary education to students before they joined a military or police academy. The school aimed to enhance the knowledge and efficiency of pre-cadets, who were divided into four battalions directly controlled by platoon commanders, their military education and training being provided by the Regiment of Cadets. Applicants to the school had to be unmarried and between 14 and 17 years of age, with educational qualifications to the level of Grade 10, and they had to meet the health and height qualifications required by the armed forces or police.<sup>8</sup>

In its accession declaration to the Optional Protocol, Thailand stated that admission to military schools was on a voluntary basis, depending on success in the entrance examinations and subject to the consent of parents or legal guardians. High school and university students regardless of gender could apply voluntarily to receive military training from the Army Reserve Command, with the consent of parents or legal guardians. Students who completed three years’ training were exempt from military service as active military personnel when they reached the age of 21.<sup>9</sup> The minimum age for enrolment in the Reserve Officer Training Corps was 16.<sup>10</sup>

---

### Armed groups

Although reliable information was scarce, there were credible reports of the use of children in operations by separatist armed groups in southern Thailand.<sup>11</sup> The most active of the separatist groups, the National Revolution Front-Coordinate (Barisan Revolusi Nasional-Koordinasi, BRN-C), had a youth wing with over 7,000 members, which, together with units organized into cells, was reported to be responsible for much of the violence.<sup>12</sup> Between January 2004 and June 2007 separatist groups were responsible for the deaths of at least 70 teachers, and burned down 170 government schools.<sup>13</sup> Children were among those who were killed.<sup>14</sup>

BRN-C was reported to have penetrated some Islamic elementary schools and private boarding schools (ponohs) in the southern provinces.<sup>15</sup> There was no information to indicate that military training took place in the schools, but according to some sources “suitable” children or young people were selected to join after-school study groups, where initiation into the BRN-C began. The number of children in the BRN-C or other armed groups was not clear, nor was the extent to which under-18s took part in their operations. However, there were indications that boys below the age of 18, some in their early teens, were used to distribute leaflets and write graffiti, and for sabotage and arson.<sup>16</sup> Occasionally, under-18s were reported to have been used to plant bombs.<sup>17</sup>

Some reports indicated that government forces had killed children suspected of involvement in the southern insurgency.<sup>18</sup> There were also reports of the arbitrary detention of under-18s suspected of belonging or having links to armed groups. More than 600 people, of whom at least six were under 18, were reportedly detained in operations from June to August 2007 and had “volunteered” to undergo a program of four months’ occupational training in an army camp as an alternative to being charged with offences relating to national security.<sup>19</sup> The six were reported to have been released in August. In its declaration on accession to the Optional Protocol, Thailand stated that “Non-governmental militias are prohibited by law, regardless of the age of persons concerned.”<sup>20</sup>

## Developments

Several thousand Lao Hmong asylum seekers remained in a camp in Phetchabun province in poor conditions. According to some sources, a large percentage of the camp population were children.<sup>21</sup>

Over 140,000 refugees, largely from the Karen ethnic group, were living in refugee camps on the Thailand–Myanmar border.<sup>22</sup> Tens of thousands of others were living outside the camps; these reportedly included former child soldiers, who had escaped from the Myanmar armed forces (Tatmadaw) and were reported to encounter discrimination, ostracism and other difficulties in the refugee camps. Many former Tatmadaw child soldiers who fled to Thailand remained outside the camps, where they had no access to support or services. Increasing restrictions imposed by the Thai authorities on international organizations made it extremely difficult for these organizations to provide protection for former child soldiers crossing the border.<sup>23</sup>

There were reports of the recruitment of several children who lived in Mae La refugee camp in Thailand by the Karen National Union–Karen National Liberation Army – Peace Council (KNU-KNLA PC), which had broken away from the

KNLA (an ethnic Karen armed group fighting the Tatmadaw) and made peace with the Myanmar government in 2007.<sup>24</sup> There were reported to be plans by the UN Working Group on children affected by armed conflict to develop a formal system for monitoring and reporting on the recruitment of child soldiers from the camps.<sup>25</sup>

- 1 Human Rights Watch (HRW), “‘It was like suddenly my son no longer existed’: enforced disappearances in Thailand’s southern border provinces”, *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 19, No. 5(C), March 2007.
- 2 *Amnesty International Report 2007*.
- 3 Second periodic report of Thailand to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 31 May 2005, UN Doc. CRC/C/83/Add.15.
- 4 Global Security, “Royal Thai Military”, [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org).
- 5 CIA, *The World Factbook*, Thailand.
- 6 Second periodic report of Thailand, above note 3.
- 7 Declaration of Thailand on acceding to the Optional Protocol, 27 February 2006, [www2.ohchr.org](http://www2.ohchr.org).
- 8 Thailand Armed Forces Academies, [www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/5522/T\\_T\\_HE.HTM](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/5522/T_T_HE.HTM).
- 9 Declaration of Thailand, above note 7.
- 10 “Training for war so that we may live in peace”, *Bangkok Post*, 10 October 2006, [www.bangkokpost.net](http://www.bangkokpost.net).
- 11 Confidential correspondence, June 2007.
- 12 HRW, “‘Suddenly my son no longer existed’”, above note 1.
- 13 HRW, “Thailand: education in the south engulfed in fear”, 14 June 2007.
- 14 HRW, “No One is Safe: Insurgent Violence Against Civilians in Thailand’s Southern Border Provinces”, August 2007.
- 15 International Crisis Group (ICG), “Southern Thailand: insurgency, not jihad”, May 2005.
- 16 Confidential interviews, Bangkok, February 2007.
- 17 Coalition confidential source.
- 18 “Army vows to probe killing of teenagers by unit, and take action if soldiers guilty”, *Nation*, 15 April 2007, [www.nationmultimedia.com](http://www.nationmultimedia.com).
- 19 Working Group on Peace and Justice, “The human rights situation in south Thailand”, briefing note, 20 August 2007. Copy on file at Coalition.
- 20 Declaration of Thailand, above note 7.
- 21 HRW, “Thailand: Protect Hmong refugees: more than 8,000 Lao Hmong at risk of forced repatriation”, 30 August 2007.
- 22 UNHCR, “Borders with Myanmar remain calm; no influx of refugees”, UNHCR News Stories, 1 October 2007.
- 23 “Sold to be soldiers: the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Burma”, *Human Rights Watch*, Vol. 19, No. 15(C), October 2007.

- 24 Karen Human Rights Group, “Child soldiers recruited to support the expansion of the KNU-KNLA Peace Council”, news bulletin, 28 May 2007, [www.khrg.org](http://www.khrg.org).
- 25 Thai Burma Border Consortium, TBBC Programme Report: January to June 2007, 30 Aug 2007.