
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Population: 1.3 million (0.4 million under 18)

Government armed forces: 2,700 (estimate)

Compulsory recruitment age: no conscription

Voluntary recruitment age: 16

Voting age: 18

Optional Protocol: not signed

Other treaties ratified (see glossary):

CRC, GC AP I and II, ICC, ILO 182

The minimum age of recruitment was raised in 2000 to 16 years with parental consent. It is possible that under-18s were present in the armed forces but no information was available.

Context

Political parties continued to divide largely on ethnic grounds.¹ The UN Special Rapporteur on racism and racial discrimination, who visited Trinidad and Tobago in July 2003, noted that political parties had exploited ethnic divisions although political leaders had since set in motion reforms and consultation aimed at ending racial discrimination.²

Government

National recruitment legislation and practice

The armed forces consist of the regular forces and the coast guards, for which the minimum age of recruitment is 18, and a volunteer reserve, for which the minimum age is 25.³ There is no conscription. Children aged from 12 to 19 are eligible to join the cadet force, which, like the armed forces and police, is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Security. Recruitment is through the school system and the consent of the child's parents as well as the school's principal is required.⁴

In June 2003, in its second periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the government stated that Section 19 of the Defence Force Act had been amended by the Miscellaneous Provisions (Children) Act, No. 66 of 2000, so that "a person below the age of sixteen years can no longer be enlisted into the Defence Force. Further, persons between the ages of sixteen years and eighteen years can only be enlisted if parental consent is obtained. Previously any child below the age of eighteen years could be enlisted if parental consent was

obtained". The government further confirmed that, as domestic law was silent on the minimum age for participation in hostilities, it appeared that any person, once recruited and trained, could be sent into combat, including for military service outside the country.⁵ No information was provided on the number of under-18s in the security forces.

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- 1 BBC News, "Country profile: Trinidad and Tobago", 18 December 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.
 - 2 Interim report of UN Special Rapporteur on the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, UN Doc. A/58/313, 22 August 2003, <http://www.ohchr.org>.
 - 3 Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, <http://www.ttdf.mil.tt>.
 - 4 Second periodic report of Trinidad and Tobago to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, June 2003, (to be considered by the Committee in 2005), <http://www.ohchr.org>.
 - 5 Second periodic report of Trinidad and Tobago to UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, op. cit.