
Child Soldiers Coalition Recommendations

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers has monitored patterns of child recruitment in Afghanistan and Pakistan and warns that there may be unprecedented levels of child recruitment and mobilisation. It is also concerned about under-18 year olds recruited into western military forces including United States and British militaries, both of which regularly deploy under-18s. These are the October 2001 recommendations made by the Coalition:

To the UN Security Council

- integrate specific measures for child protection into its political actions on Afghanistan, including by incorporating action to stop child recruitment;
- Task the UN Special Mission on Afghanistan with monitoring the recruitment of children and deploy child protection advisers with any future UN peacekeeping or humanitarian operations;

To all governments

- End all political, financial and material support, including by private networks and institutions, to armed forces and armed groups that recruit and use children for military purposes;
- Sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict;
- Ensure there is no deployment of under-18s with military forces involved in response to the current crisis;
- Take all feasible measures to

prevent the recruitment of children by armed groups within domestic jurisdiction, making such recruitment a criminal offence;

- Support donor action in Pakistan to regulate the madrasa system and bolster education and employment opportunities, particularly for vulnerable children in refugee diaspora and tribal areas;
- Convene the foreshadowed OIC Ministerial Conference on Child and Social Affairs to develop a comprehensive plan of action for child protection in the current crisis;
- Grant refugee status to children under 18 fleeing persecution in Afghanistan including possible military recruitment;

To the Government of Pakistan

- publicly denounce the use of children as soldiers or operatives by all armed forces and armed groups;
- sign and ratify the Optional Protocol without reservations and take effective steps to criminalise underage recruitment by non-state actors and prosecute those responsible;
- deploy police to monitor *madrasas* during the current situation, particularly any signs of closure and movement of students;
- introduce comprehensive legal standards for *madrasa* schools including public registration by age of all students and strict prohibition on all military training and recruitment;
- grant refugee status and protection to children under 18 fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, including military recruitment;

- restrict the movement of children under 18 out of Pakistan unless accompanied by their guardians and for an verifiable civilian purpose.

To see the full report, go to:
www.child-soldiers.org

Ban on Child Soldiers to Enter into Force

The Australian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers welcomes the news that a treaty banning the use of children in armed conflict will come into effect early in 2002.



Currently there are at least 300,000 children actively engaged in armed conflict in more than 40 countries around the world,

including Afghanistan and Uganda.

The treaty, the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, prohibits both the participation of children under the age of 18 in hostilities, and their forced recruitment. It also calls on states to raise the minimum age for voluntary recruitment above 15 years.

New Zealand became the tenth nation to ratify the Optional Protocol on 12 November. In accordance with the provisions of the treaty, it will become binding under international law on 12 February 2002. Other governments that have ratified the Protocol to date are Andorra, Bangladesh, Canada, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Holy See, Iceland, Panama, Romania and Sri Lanka.

Australian Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers spokesperson, Alison Wells, said another 77 countries have now signed the Protocol, but not yet ratified it. However, Australia has not yet signed the treaty and joined the growing international consensus on this important issue.

“We’re urging the Australian Government to sign the Optional Protocol at the earliest date and play its part in ensuring this treaty achieves universal support and is implemented as quickly as possible,” Ms Wells said.

The Coalition urges the Government to set 18 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment to and deployment with the Australian Defence Force when it signs the Protocol. This will enhance Australia’s role in promoting age 18 as the consistent age in all international law provisions relating to children.

“This treaty is an important step forward for the international community in ensuring an end to the use of children as soldiers, and deserves Australia’s full support,” Ms. Wells said.

Source: Australian Coalition To Stop The Use Of Child Soldiers Press Release 19 November 2001.

DCI-A is a partner in the Coalition along with: Amnesty International, Medical Association for the Prevention of War, Mercy Refugee Services, National Council of Churches Australia, PLAN International, Quaker Service Australia, Save the Children Australia, UNICEF Australia, United Nations Youth Association Australia, Uniting Church in Australia (Vic), Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, World Vision Australia. Red Cross Australia has observer status.

Dozens of primary school students were abducted from Burundian schools in November to serve as soldiers for the Forces for the Defense of Democracy in their war against the Government. Human Rights Watch called on the former President of South Africa and a mediator in the Burundian civil war to make a plea for their release.