

## **CHILD SOLDIERS: Call for more States to sign pact**

France and UNICEF have urged more countries to sign an international set of principles outlawing the use of child soldiers and helping restore them to civilian life. Governments of 59 countries originally signed the "Paris Commitments" in February, pledging to do more to prevent children from being recruited as soldiers. Another seven committed themselves at Monday's meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

French Secretary of State for Human Rights, Rama Yade, called Monday's meeting to rally support for the principles, drawn up with the United Nations children's agency UNICEF, which estimates that more than 250,000 children were recruited or used by armed forces in 2006.

"Every country says that they support the commitments and the principles of Paris," Yade told reporters after the meeting. "The problem is some accept to sign and the others don't."

She cited the United States as an example of a country that backs the core principles but has not signed because it opposes a clause dealing with the International Criminal Court.

"There are not two camps, on the one side against, on the other side for. It's more complicated," Yade said.

February's meeting in Paris agreed a set of principles, meant as practical guidelines for governments and aid groups working in the field, and commitments, which governments were asked to sign.

The documents include some 20 specific measures to protect children from being employed by armed forces or groups.

Many of the measures refer to ways of reintegrating child soldiers into society, saying such minors should be viewed "primarily as victims" and helped to overcome their traumas. The document calls for particular focus on the needs of young girls, who are often forced into sexual slavery.

The seven countries that agreed to the Paris Commitments on Monday were Argentina, Croatia, Guatemala, Laos, Mauritania, Morocco and Ukraine.

[Source: Reuters: [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org)]

### **Further information**

The [Optional Protocol](#) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict  
Visit:

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## **India: Child Bondage Continues in Indian Cotton Supply Chain**

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**More than 416,000 children under the age of 18, and 225,000 younger than 14, are involved in (often bonded) child labour in India's cottonseed fields. Most of them are girls. They work in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Compared to the 2003-2004 harvest season the total number of working children has risen. It only decreased in Andhra Pradesh because of local and international pressure.**

These are some important results from the study 'Child bondage continues in Indian cotton supply chain', published on behalf of the India Committee of the Netherlands ICN), the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF, USA), OECD Watch, German Agro-Action and OneWorld Net NRW (Germany).

The report is based on field research and has been written by well-known expert Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu, director of Glocal Research, who authored several other reports on this issue since 2001.

ICN's director Gerard Oonk says: "The report makes it chillingly clear that our cotton products are tainted with massive bonded child labour. The companies involved, both Indian and multinational, governments and international organisations should make every effort to get the children out of this pernicious work and into school. Together with organisations in India and other countries we will certainly urge them to do so."

### **Horrendous working and living conditions**

Children are made to work 8 to 12 hours a day and usually earn between Rs.20 and Rs.30 a day (hardly half a euro). They are routinely exposed to poisonous pesticides and often trafficked as migrants from other districts and even states.

In Tamil Nadu and Gujarat more than 80 per cent of the children are trafficked. E.g. North Gujarat 'receives' tens of thousands of children from the neighbouring state of Rajasthan every year. They often live in make-shift shelters and are very vulnerable to mental, physical and sexual abuse.

The report contains a number of cases on the plight of children working in the cotton fields. These include stories of two girls being raped, three children being killed due to pesticide exposure, children forced to leave school because of a drinking father and a loan to repay, and the work schedule - from 5.30 AM to 6.30 PM - of a migrant child.

The overwhelming majority of the children working in the cotton fields are Dalits ('untouchables', officially called 'scheduled castes') or Adivasi (tribals).

## Indian companies do nothing despite promises

More than thirteen big Indian companies and two multinationals, Monsanto and Bayer, are involved in this 'modern form of child slavery'. The ones which have outsourced the largest production to farmers are the Indian companies Nuziveedu, Raasi, Ankur and the American multinational Monsanto (including its Indian joint venture partner Mahyco).

They make use of more than 200,000 children employed by farmers to which they have sub-contracted the cultivation of their high-technology BT cotton seeds. The report 'The Price of Childhood' (October 2005) by Dr. Venkateswarlu provided ample evidence that companies outsourcing their seed production to farmers, are paying almost 40 per cent too little to enable them to hire adults for the local minimum wage of Rs.52 instead of children.

After years of both local and international advocacy on the issue the two multinational involved, Bayer (through its subsidiary Proagro) and Monsanto started working on the issue, both by monitoring and by giving slightly better prices to farmers, though much remains to be done (see 'Seeds of Change', May 2007). However the big Indian companies have

hardly done anything, despite resolutions and action plans by their associations from 2003 onwards.

## Further information

Child labour: information and resources: <http://www.crin.org/themes/ViewTheme.asp?id=3>

Child labour: Caution - Children at Work: Galvanizing Communities to End Child Labor (August 2007)

Child labour: Seeds of Change (June 2007) : <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=13657&flag=report>

Visit: <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=14973>

### UN launches \$220 million campaign to educate vulnerable children

The United Nations refugee agency has launched a campaign to raise \$220 million by 2010 to allow 9 million refugee and vulnerable children, particularly those from Sudan's Darfur region, Iraq and Colombia, to get an education, partly based on the Internet as well as by getting teachers into remote locations.

Launching the campaign at the annual Clinton Global Initiative summit in New York, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) António Guterres called the initiative "a means of ensuring that vulnerable children are fully able to realise their right to an education."

The renewed *nine million* campaign, through a so-called Education (Plus) programme, seeks to address all aspects of a child's educational needs from teachers and notebooks to transportation, water and vocational training. Its programme puts particular emphasis on getting girls into the classroom.

The campaign brings together UNHCR and private sector partners such as sports goods maker Nike, software giant Microsoft, employment service provider Manpower, the advertising group WPP, and GSMA, an association of mobile phone operators and equipment suppliers.

The initial focus of nine million will be on uprooted children from Darfur, Iraq and Colombia, which are among the world's worst displacement crises. The campaign was originally launched last year on World Refugee Day, 20 June, to open up education and sports opportunities for millions of refugee children around the world. Many have already benefited. The unveiling of Education (Plus) at the three-day CGI re-launches the campaign and gives it new concrete goals.

In a related development 150,000 children in conflict areas, especially Iraq and the occupied Palestinian Territory, will benefit from a distance-learning project under a \$30-million grant from the William J. Clinton Foundation to UNICEF which is working with Microsoft, the International Rescue Committee and computer maker Hewlett Packard on the project.