



## U.N. FIGHTS TO STOP USE OF CHILDREN IN GLOBAL ARMED CONFLICT

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*More than 250,000 children were recruited to fight wars, abducted for sexual slavery, and maimed in armed conflict across the world last year, according to a United Nations report released this month.*

The United Nations presented a plan and list of punishments to reduce the number of child soldiers in countries where armed conflict has killed more than 2 million children in the past 10 years.

In a speech on the report, Olara Otunnu, the special representative for children and armed conflict, said 42 armed groups in 11 countries are recruiting child soldiers. He said there is a need to implement a monitoring and reporting "mechanism" to lower the number of children hurt in places where abuses continue to occur.

### **Children fighting in wars**

While the United Nations does not have a strict definition of "armed conflict," the report looked at instances where children seeking asylum or refugee status were denied humanitarian relief.

In an attempt to shame armed military groups and the countries that house them, the report named offending parties in 11 countries: Burundi, Congo, Ivory Coast, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda in Africa; Colombia in South America; and the Asian nations of Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka.

It also listed the improved progress of countries such as Afghanistan, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia. There are also updates in the report of children being attacked in the Mideast, specifically Israel, Palestinian territories and Iraq.

The United Nations hopes that naming countries and armed groups will draw attention, and could convince other governments to end weapons sales and financial aid. The report said increased global awareness brought a drop of 50,000 child soldiers last year.

### **Possible solutions**

In the past, the United Nations has recommended three possible solutions: travel restrictions on leaders of groups who have not shown any progress in reducing the number of child soldiers; a

ban on those leaders from governing and amnesty in possible war crime trials; and an embargo on arms, military assistance and flow of money to those groups

The latest report presents a comprehensive "monitoring and compliance mechanism" to keep track of groups that violate children's rights.

It proposes a task force led by about a dozen separate child human rights groups. Reports of child brutality will be tracked by local U.N. peacekeepers or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Save the Children.

The plan also seeks deals with groups that violate children's human rights. For example, five armed groups in Burundi met with U.N. officials in June 2004 and agreed to release child soldiers. After discussions, several armed groups said they would stop recruiting children under the age of 18 and work with a national child demobilization program to transfer more than 2,260 children from war zones to their respective homes and families.

### **Too big a task?**

Some members of the United Nation worry that monitoring plan is too ambitious to be effective.

Stuart Holliday, the U.S. ambassador, expressed concern that already strapped U.N. workers would not be able to successfully track and report problems.

The United Kingdom representative said the proposed mechanism should be practical and realistic to ensure action was effective.

Some diplomats pointed out that some of the violations have been committed by U.N. peacekeepers themselves. In the African nation of Congo, 25 U.N. civilian and military personnel have been investigated for sexual abuse of women and children.

One U.N. peacekeeper has resigned and another is being held in France on criminal charges.

In response to the sexual allegations, U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan called for "swift action to punish those responsible and bring the practice to an end in all peacekeeping missions."

*--Compiled by Evelio Contreras for NewsHour Extra*

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