

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT: Security Council Resolution Provides for New Monitoring and Reporting System

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[27 July 2005] - Following a lengthy debate that started in February 2005, the UN Security Council (SC) has finally adopted a resolution aimed at protecting children exposed to armed conflict. The new resolution, which was voted for unanimously by all 15 members of the SC, is calling for a series of measures to be taken, including the establishment of a mechanism for monitoring and reporting violations, a SC Working Group to monitor progress and oversee implementation of these measures, and a demand to offending parties to prepare and implement concrete action plans for ending violations against children.

The proposed new mechanism will be monitoring violations by all parties, both governments and insurgents, including: killing and maiming of children, recruiting or using child soldiers, rape or other sexual violence against children, abduction of children, denial of humanitarian access for children and attacks against schools or hospitals. Under the new mechanism, UN-led task forces will be established in phases, to monitor the conduct of all parties and transmit regular reports to a central task force in New York.

Olara Otunnu, the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict said the UN had entered the 'era of application', "for the first time, the UN is establishing a formal, structured and detailed compliance regime of this kind. This brings together all the key elements we have been developing, over the last few years, to ensure accountability and compliance on the ground".

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers believes the proposed monitoring and reporting mechanism will be a positive development if serious efforts are made to report in detail on the serious violations of children's rights outlined in the SG's report. "The practicalities of implementing the mechanism have yet to be confronted. For it to work successfully it is vital that information from a wide range of government and civil society organisations is properly utilised and channelled upward to the Security Council and other international mechanisms responsible for child protection" says Victoria Forbes Adam from the Coalition.

The Coalition also welcomes the establishment of the SC Working group that will monitor the process of time-bound action plans to stop the use of children in armed conflict and to review reports of the violations outlined above. "However, comments

Forbes Adam, "if the Security Council fails to take concrete action in response to reports of continuing violations then the new mechanisms will have failed, children will continue to suffer egregious human rights violations and the Security Council will lose credibility."

Overall, the Coalition said it was disappointed that the Security Council has again skirted the issue of targeted and graduated sanctions (such as cessation of military assistance, a ban on the export and supply of small arms and light weapons, travel bans, etc.) against government forces and armed groups well known for recruiting and using children. Such measures were initially proposed (although not explicitly defined) in resolution 1379 of 2002 and were explicitly called for in last year's resolution 1539.

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict applauds this new resolution but said the SC's work begins with this resolution, "for the hundreds of thousands of children and their families that are devastated by armed conflicts raging around the globe, the UN must now ensure this system does not become a rhetorical exercise in information collection" said Julia Freedson.

The Watchlist is making several recommendations to the SC to ensure child protection systems are implemented, namely that the SC should ensure that political interests of parties in conflict do not interfere with the review of data submitted, it should impose targeted measures against parties that continue to recruit and use children as soldiers, and UN agencies collecting information on the ground must respect and engage with local civil society organisations and community leaders as equal partners.