

Urgent Call for Nepal to set 18 years as Minimum Age for Voluntary Recruitment

Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers Partnerships for Protecting Children in Armed Conflict - Nepal Save the Children - Nepal Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict

January 25, 2006, Kathmandu and New York – A global network of leading human rights and humanitarian agencies calls upon the Government of Nepal to set 18 as the minimum age of voluntary recruitment into armed forces in Nepal. In a letter dated, January 25, 2006, the non-governmental organizations called on the Nepali Government to urgently complete its December 2005 ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Children by depositing a binding declaration with the United Nations Secretary General, which should set out Nepal's minimum voluntary recruitment age as 18 and should outline specific safeguards for such recruitment.

“With its recent ratification of the Optional Protocol, Nepal has now joined the growing global consensus that children should never be used as weapons of war. However, for Nepal to be formally recognized as a state party to this Optional Protocol, we urgently call upon the Government of Nepal to deposit a binding declaration with the UN explicitly stating that eighteen years will be the minimum age for voluntary military recruitment in Nepal,” said Keith Leslie, a representative of Save the Children in Nepal.

“It is difficult to assess the extent of child soldiering in Nepal. However, reports are widespread of use and recruitment of children by the Maoists, whose forces may include up to 30,000 young people. There are also reports of ongoing use of children as informants by the government forces,” said, Anjana Shakya, a member of the PPCC network and representative of HimRights, a leading human rights organization in Kathmandu. *“The government of Nepal should urgently develop a clear policy and take both the formal and informal steps towards the safe disarmament, demobilization and long-term reintegration for all children associated with armed groups and forces in Nepal,”* she continued.

The participation of children in armed conflicts is not limited to direct combat roles. Child soldiers perform a range of tasks including participation in combat, laying mines and explosives; scouting, spying, acting as decoys, couriers or guards; training, drill or other preparations; logistics and support functions, portering, cooking and domestic labour; and sexual slavery or other recruitment for sexual purposes.

The Optional Protocol was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 May 2000 and entered into force on 12 February 2002. The protocol sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for recruitment into armed groups, and for compulsory recruitment by governments. States may accept volunteers from the age of 16 but must deposit a binding declaration at the time of ratification or accession, setting out their minimum voluntary recruitment age and outlining certain safeguards for such recruitment. **Many states have used their binding declaration to set 18 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment.** To date, 121 member states have signed the optional protocol and 105 have ratified.

Members of the global network of leading human rights and humanitarian agencies calling for Nepal to deposit its binding declaration to the Optional Protocol include Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Partnerships for Protecting Children in Armed Conflict – Nepal, Save the Children – Nepal and Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict.

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict is a global network of non-governmental organizations dedicated to monitoring and reporting on violations against children in armed conflict. The Watchlist is managed by a Steering Committee of 6 international NGOs that are leaders in child protection.