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NGOs Urge UNSC to take immediate action to protect children in war zones

New York, NY - Today several non-governmental organizations unite in a call for the United Nations Security Council at its open debate on children and armed conflict to take immediate action to protect children's security and rights in armed conflicts around the world.

The lives and futures of millions of children are at stake everyday in 35-armed conflicts worldwide. The major challenge for the Council is to ensure respect for international law and commitments to protect children in specific situations.

The Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, two non-governmental networks, recommend that the UN Security Council take stronger action to protect children in armed conflict. Practical actions by the Security Council to significantly improve children's lives include:

- * Explicitly name all parties that continue to recruit or use child soldiers and undertake discussions with them. Faced with no significant progress on ending warring parties' abuse of children, the Council should act to stop the flow of arms to such situations and consider sanctions which may assist in stopping the recruitment and use of child soldiers.
- * Ensure that all Council resolutions on specific conflict situations specifically address children and armed conflict, to ensure that child protection becomes a top priority throughout the UN system.
- * Establish protocols in the UN system for ensuring that special protections outlined in UN Security Council resolutions on children in armed conflict are implemented during emergencies, especially unhindered access to humanitarian assistance.
- * Ensure that, where boys and girls are involved in armed conflict, all children are included in all disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes after the fighting ends.
- * Establish an informal working group of the Council to develop general procedures for improving the coordination and effectiveness of UN initiatives in cooperation with regional and other international organizations on behalf of children affected by armed conflict.

Explaining the urgent need for stronger action to protect children in specific armed conflicts, Casey Kelso, Coordinator of the Child Soldiers Coalition, said, "While progress has been made in recent years to protect children in armed conflicts, significant challenges still exist in implementing international commitments, such as the Optional Protocol to end the recruitment and use of children as soldiers. "This is an historic opportunity for the Council to take a major step forward in child protection," he said.

Julia Freedson, Watchlist Coordinator, said, "We hope the Council's open debate will indicate an international willingness to take stronger action to protect children." She continued, "NGOs believe the Council must adopt a strong resolution setting out a clear path for protecting children. The Council must implement its previous commitments with a clear action plan to end abuses and hold violators accountable."

Representatives from the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Save the Children, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict and Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children made recommendations to the UN Security Council yesterday during a closed door, informal briefing with UN Security Council members. They spoke about access to humanitarian assistance, needs for improved monitoring and reporting on violations against children, child soldier use in conflicts and threats of HIV/AIDS to young people in conflict situations.

NGOs will brief the press on their conversation with Security Council Members tomorrow, January 14, 2003 at 2:00pm at the United Nations Press Room (2nd Floor).

For more information and further NGO recommendations to the UN Security Council see the following publications:

- * Protection Children: Implementing Resolution 1379, www.watchlist.org
- * Child Soldiers Coalition 1379 Report, www.child-soldiers.org
- * Children and Armed Conflict: Symposium on Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1379, November 8, 2002, www.watchlist.org and www.child-soldiers.org

Background

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was formed in May 1998 by leading non-governmental organisations to seek to end the military recruitment and participation in armed conflict of all children under 18 years of age. Its steering committee members currently include Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, Jesuit Refugee Service, Quaker United Nations Office - Geneva, Radda Barnen for the International Save the Children Alliance, Terre des Hommes and World Vision International and several regional NGOs from Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

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