

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

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The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers unites national, regional and international organisations and Coalitions in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Its founding organisations are Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva and World Vision International.

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## REPORT SHOWS CHILD SOLDIER USE CONTINUES UNABATED

New York, 19 January 2004 - Children continued to be used as soldiers, sexual slaves, labourers, porters and spies throughout 2003 in both newly-erupting and longstanding conflicts, according to a report released on the eve of the United Nations Security Council's fourth open debate on children and armed conflict.

The report, released today by the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, details evidence of governments and armed groups recruiting and using child soldiers in numerous conflicts worldwide. The Coalition calls for action by the UN Security Council to insist upon - and enforce - an end to child recruitment.

*"The Secretary-General has publicly named governments and armed groups using children in war. The test for the Security Council is to hold these governments and groups accountable for their actions,"* said Casey Kelso, Coalition Coordinator.

The 50-page report, "**Child Soldier Use 2003**", is intended to help the Security Council formulate concrete solutions during its annual debate on children and armed conflict, scheduled for Tuesday 20 January. The Coalition report identifies 18 different countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East where child soldier issues remain part of the gross abuse of human rights in an armed conflict or its aftermath.

The Coalition's report provides evidence that in many conflicts, such as **Cote d'Ivoire**, parts of the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)** and **Liberia**, a massive increase in

recruitment occurred during 2003. Horrifying reports emerged from the **DRC** of children being raped and tortured, as well as forced to commit atrocities against civilians. Abductions of children in northern **Uganda** by the Lord's Resistance Army are at the highest point of the conflict's 17-year history. Thousands of children in northern Uganda continue to flee their homes at night to avoid being abducted into brutal combat and servitude.

In **Myanmar** there was little if any progress in ending child soldiering, with an estimated 70,000 children in the government armed forces. Exiled children told of being abducted by government forces and taken to military camps where they were subject to beatings, forced labour and combat. Recent reports from **Colombia** reveal that the number of children used by armed groups may have increased to around 11,000 in recent years, with children as young as 12 trained and deployed to use explosives and weapons. In **Sri Lanka** the forced conscription of children by the armed opposition Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) continues, despite LTTE pledges to demobilize children from their ranks.

The Coalition recommends that Security Council members should:

- Make sure there is an annual updated list of all parties to armed conflict that recruit or use child soldiers;
  - Follow up on this list by asking those using child soldiers to provide - within 90 days - information on steps they are taking to end recruitment and use of child soldiers;
  - Designate a UN representative to start talks with those using child soldiers, and to assist them in developing action plans with them to end such practices;
  - Verify whether armed groups and forces are implementing such action plans;
  - End weapons flows, particularly small arms, to those recruiting and using children;
- and
- Use other means to enforce an international ban on child soldiering, such as travel restrictions on leaders using children in their armies, banning them from attending international events and organisations, ending military assistance to their governments or groups, and restricting the flow of financial resources to the parties concerned.

*"Adopting resolution after resolution which fail to protect children from conflict has created 'resolution fatigue' among governments at the UN and cynicism among the public," the Coalition's Casey Kelso said. "The UN should step up efforts to demand accountability by governments and groups using child soldiers. The Council should act to end weapons flows to violators and apply targeted sanctions to parties that fail to end their use of child soldiers."*

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