

106TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 348

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing condemnation of the use of children as soldiers and expressing the belief that the United States should support and, where possible, lead efforts to end this abuse of human rights.

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Whereas in the year 2000 approximately 300,000 individuals under the age of 18 are participating in armed conflict in more than 30 countries worldwide;

Whereas many of these children are forcibly conscripted through kidnaping or coercion, while others join military units due to economic necessity, to avenge the loss of a family member, or for their own personal safety;

Whereas many military commanders frequently force child soldiers to commit gruesome acts of ritual killings or torture against their enemies, including against other children;

Whereas many military commanders separate children from their families in order to foster dependence on military units and leaders, leaving children vulnerable to manipulation, deep traumatization, and in need of psychological counseling and rehabilitation;

Whereas child soldiers are exposed to hazardous conditions and risk physical injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, malnutrition, deformed backs and shoulders from carrying overweight loads, and respiratory and skin infections;

Whereas many young female soldiers face the additional psychological and physical horrors of rape and sexual abuse, being enslaved for sexual purposes by militia commanders, and forced to endure severe social stigma should they return home;

Whereas children in northern Uganda continue to be kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) which is supported and funded by the Government of Sudan and which has committed and continues to commit gross human rights violations in Uganda;

Whereas children in Sri Lanka have been forcibly recruited by the opposition Tamil Tigers movement and forced to kill or be killed in the armed conflict in that country;

Whereas an estimated 7,000 child soldiers have been involved in the conflict in Sierra Leone, some as young as age 10, with many being forced to commit extrajudicial execu-

tions, torture, rape, and amputations for the rebel Revolutionary United Front;

Whereas on January 21, 2000, in Geneva, a United Nations Working Group, including representatives from more than 80 governments including the United States, reached consensus on an optional protocol on the use of child soldiers;

Whereas this optional protocol will raise the international minimum age for conscription to age 18 and will require governments to take all feasible measures to ensure that members of their armed forces under the age of 18 do not participate directly in combat, prohibit the recruitment and use in armed conflict of persons under the age of 18 by nongovernmental armed forces, encourage governments to raise the minimum legal age for voluntary recruits above the current standard of 15 and, commits governments to support the demobilization and rehabilitation of child soldiers, and when possible, to allocate resources to this purpose;

Whereas on October 29, 1998, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan set minimum age requirements for United Nations peacekeeping personnel that are made available by member nations of the United Nations;

Whereas the participating States of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in the 1999 Charter for European Security signed in Istanbul, Turkey, committed themselves to “develop and implement measures to promote the rights and interests of children in armed conflict and postconflict situations, including refugees and internally displaced children” and to “look at ways of preventing forced or compulsory recruitment for use in armed conflict of persons under 18 years of age”;

Whereas United Nations Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Bernard Miyet, announced in the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly that contributing governments of member nations were asked not to send civilian police and military observers under the age of 25, and that troops in national contingents should preferably be at least 21 years of age but in no case should they be younger than 18 years of age;

Whereas on August 25, 1999, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1261 (1999) condemning the use of children in armed conflicts;

Whereas in addressing the Security Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu, urged the adoption of a global three-pronged approach to combat the use of children in armed conflict, first to raise the age limit for recruitment and participation in armed conflict from the present age of 15 to the age of 18, second, to increase international pressure on armed groups which currently abuse children, and third to address the political, social, and economic factors which create an environment where children are induced by appeal of ideology or by socioeconomic collapse to become child soldiers;

Whereas the United States delegation to the United Nations working group relating to child soldiers, which included representatives from the Department of Defense, supported the Geneva agreement on the optional protocol;

Whereas on May 25, 2000, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the optional protocol on the use of child soldiers;

Whereas the optional protocol was opened for signature on June 5, 2000; and

Whereas President Clinton has publicly announced his support of the optional protocol and a speedy process of review and signature: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring), That—*

3 (1) the Congress joins the international commu-
4 nity in—

5 (A) condemning the use of children as sol-
6 diers by governmental and nongovernmental
7 armed forces worldwide;

8 (B) welcoming the optional protocol as a
9 critical first step in ending the use of children
10 as soldiers; and

11 (C) applauding the decision by the United
12 States Government to support the protocol;

13 (2) it is the sense of the Congress that—

14 (A) President Clinton should be com-
15 mended for signing the optional protocol and
16 should consult closely with the Senate with the
17 objective of building support for this protocol;

18 (B) the President and the Congress should
19 work together to enact a law that establishes a
20 fund for the rehabilitation and reintegration
21 into society of child soldiers; and

1 (C) the Departments of State and Defense
2 should undertake all possible efforts to per-
3 suade and encourage other governments to rat-
4 ify and endorse the new optional protocol on the
5 use of child soldiers.

Passed the House of Representatives July 11, 2000.

Attest:

Clerk.