

CHILD SOLDIERS: Call for more States to sign pact

France and UNICEF have urged more countries to sign an international set of principles outlawing the use of child soldiers and helping restore them to civilian life. Governments of 59 countries originally signed the "Paris Commitments" in February, pledging to do more to prevent children from being recruited as soldiers. Another seven committed themselves at Monday's meeting on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly.

French Secretary of State for Human Rights, Rama Yade, called Monday's meeting to rally support for the principles, drawn up with the United Nations children's agency UNICEF, which estimates that more than 250,000 children were recruited or used by armed forces in 2006.

"Every country says that they support the commitments and the principles of Paris," Yade told reporters after the meeting. "The problem is some accept to sign and the others don't."

She cited the United States as an example of a country that backs the core principles but has not signed because it opposes a clause dealing with the International Criminal Court.

"There are not two camps, on the one side against, on the other side for. It's more complicated," Yade said.

February's meeting in Paris agreed a set of principles, meant as practical guidelines for governments and aid groups working in the field, and commitments, which governments were asked to sign.

The documents include some 20 specific measures to protect children from being employed by armed forces or groups.

Many of the measures refer to ways of reintegrating child soldiers into society, saying such minors should be viewed "primarily as victims" and helped to overcome their traumas. The document calls for particular focus on the needs of young girls, who are often forced into sexual slavery.

The seven countries that agreed to the Paris Commitments on Monday were Argentina, Croatia, Guatemala, Laos, Mauritania, Morocco and Ukraine.

[Source: Reuters: www.alertnet.org]

Further information

The [Optional Protocol](#) on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
Visit:

India: Child Bondage Continues in Indian Cotton Supply Chain

More than 416,000 children under the age of 18, and 225,000 younger than 14, are involved in (often bonded) child labour in India's cottonseed fields. Most of them are girls. They work in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Compared to the 2003-2004 harvest season the total number of working children has risen. It only decreased in Andhra Pradesh because of local and international pressure.

These are some important results from the study 'Child bondage continues in Indian cotton supply chain', published on behalf of the India Committee of the Netherlands ICN), the International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF, USA), OECD Watch, German Agro-Action and OneWorld Net NRW (Germany).

The report is based on field research and has been written by well-known expert Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu, director of Glocal Research, who authored several other reports on this issue since 2001.

ICN's director Gerard Oonk says: "The report makes it chillingly clear that our cotton products are tainted with massive bonded child labour. The companies involved, both Indian and multinational, governments and international organisations should make every effort to get the children out of this pernicious work and into school. Together with organisations in India and other countries we will certainly urge them to do so."

Horrendous working and living conditions

Children are made to work 8 to 12 hours a day and usually earn between Rs.20 and Rs.30 a day (hardly half a euro). They are routinely exposed to poisonous pesticides and often trafficked as migrants from other districts and even states.