

European Parliament Resolution on Child Soldiers

17 December 1998

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- having regard to the 1996 UN report of Mrs Graca Machal (A/51/306) and the appointment of Mr Olara Otunnu as UN Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children,

A. whereas more than 300 000 children under the age of 18 are currently taking part in hostilities around the world and many more have been recruited, B. whereas children suffer disproportionately from the general rigours of military life, both physically and emotionally,

C. whereas since 1993 a UN working group has been considering an optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, establishing 18 as the minimum age for recruitment in armed forces,

D. welcomes the creation of an 'international coalition' to put an end to the use of child soldiers in the world,

E. whereas four EU Member States to date have a minimum age for recruitment set at 18: Belgium, Denmark, Spain and Sweden,

F. whereas the July 1998 Rome Statute of an International Criminal Court for the first time established that the recruitment and use of child soldiers under the age of 15 constitute a war crime,

G. welcoming the new UN policy regarding minimum ages for participation in UN operations by UN peacekeepers, military observers and civilian police,

1. Rejects the use in hostilities of child soldiers, be it by regular government forces or by armed opposition groups;
2. Believes that an additional protocol to the international Convention on the Rights of the Child should urgently be adopted which bans the recruitment of children under 18 and their participation in armed conflicts, and calls on the European Union to support international initiatives to this end and to adopt the same laws in their own countries;
3. Calls on the UN working group to urgently complete its task of drafting an optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and calls on the Council to agree a Joint Action in order to promote the adoption of this optional protocol and make the fight against the use of child soldiers part of the Union's policy;
4. Calls on the European Commission to direct resources for the demobilization and reintegration into society of children who have participated in armed conflicts;
5. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the UN Special Representative on the impact of armed conflict on children and the UN Human Rights Commission.