

106TH CONGRESS
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S. CON. RES. 72

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

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 10, 1999

Mr. WELLSTONE submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

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

Whereas in 1999 approximately 300,000 individuals under the age of 18 are participating in armed conflict in more than 30 countries worldwide and hundreds of thousands more are at risk of being conscripted at any given moment;

Whereas many of these children are forcibly conscripted through kidnapping 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 Lords 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 the international community is developing a consensus on how to most effectively address the problem, and toward this end, the United Nations has established a working group to negotiate an optional international agreement on child soldiers which would raise the legal age of recruitment and participation in armed conflict to age 18;

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 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; and

Whereas the United States delegation to the United Nations working group relating to child soldiers has opposed efforts to raise the minimum age of participation in armed conflict to the age of 18 despite the support of an overwhelming majority of countries: Now, therefore, be it

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

3 (1) the Congress joins the international commu-
4 nity in condemning the use of children as soldiers by
5 governmental and nongovernmental armed forces
6 worldwide; and

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

8 (A) the United States should not oppose
9 current efforts to negotiate an optional inter-
10 national agreement to raise the international
11 minimum age for military service to the age of
12 18;

13 (B) the Secretary of State should address
14 positively and expediently this issue in the next
15 session of the United Nations working group re-
16 lating to child soldiers before this process is
17 abandoned by the international community; and

1 (C) the President and the Congress should
2 work together to enact a law that establishes a
3 fund for the rehabilitation and reintegration
4 into society of child soldiers.

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