

WE ARE CHILDREN NOT SOLDIERS

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo signed an **Action Plan** with the United Nations to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children and sexual violence against children by the **Forces Armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC)**, on **4 October 2012**.

A **Road map** to accelerate the implementation of the Action Plan was adopted in **September 2015**.

The security situation in eastern DRC remains volatile. Military operations and clashes between armed groups are ongoing in Beni and Rutshuru territories, in North Kivu, South Kivu, former Katanga province, and former Orientale province. Children, who are estimated to make up to a third of some armed groups, continue to escape during military operations. While new cases of recruitment and use of children by various armed groups are consistently documented by the UN, the national security forces have adopted a policy to ban underage recruitment and are working to fully implement their Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children.

Despite efforts to better protect children, there are concerns regarding the arrest and detention of children for their alleged association with armed groups. Sexual violence against children remains another serious concern in DR Congo. While most of the cases documented by the UN are attributed to armed groups, the UN continues to document cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence attributed to members of the FARDC and the Police nationale congolaise (PNC).

There are ongoing efforts by the Government to hold perpetrators of grave violations accountable. High-ranking officers of the FARDC and PNC and leaders of armed groups were arrested and charged with sexual violence and recruitment and use of children. Over 50 of them have already been convicted and sentenced for sexual violence against girls.

Progress in the implementation of the Action Plan

The Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to fully implement the Action Plan to end the recruitment and use of children by the FARDC, including through the work of the office of Jeanine Mabunda, the Special advisor to the President on sexual violence and child recruitment, appointed in 2014.

In September 2015, the Ministry of Defence endorsed a Road Map identifying key priority activities to address the remaining issues required to fully implement the Action Plan. In addition, the Government is chairing a national joint coordination mechanism and ensuring the decentralization to conflict-affected provinces through the establishment of Provincial Joint Technical Working Groups (-6 have been established so far).

Road map: priority activities

- Systematic screening and separation of children found in the ranks of security forces and armed groups;
- Identification and legal action against members of the security forces who obstruct screening and separation of children;



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Road map: priority activities (cont.)

- Biometric registration of security forces personnel with appropriate age evaluation mechanisms in place;
- Establishment of child protection working groups in all provinces affected by conflict;
- Wide availability of child protection training and material including the Code of Conduct;
- Awareness raising and inclusion of sustainable training for the FARDC and other security forces.
- Decentralization of actions through provincial Road Maps;
- Support for the justice system to respond to grave children's rights violations.

The way forward to protect the children of DR Congo:

Strengthening prevention mechanisms and fight against impunity

There is progress in the fight against impunity in DR Congo. Additional support is required to operationalize the road map and to increase the capacity of the judiciary to fight impunity and hold perpetrators accountable. In 2015, the United Nations provided technical support to conduct the screening of over 17,000 troops from the FARDC. However, it will be important for the country to adopt the Standard operating procedures on age assessment, validated at technical level in April 2016, to help the FARDC identify minors countrywide and without assistance. This will help close an important gap to prevent underage recruitment.

Reintegration

Family tracing, reunification and reintegration of children are long-term challenges in DR Congo. With thousands of children in the ranks of armed groups, and hundreds separated each year, resources are needed to provide adequate reintegration services, including psycho-social support, education and vocational training in communities with limited or no services. Cases of re-recruitment are regularly documented by the UN in DR Congo, which indicates the importance of providing sustainable services.

The special needs of survivors of sexual violence, including girls associated with armed groups, as illustrated by a recent MONUSCO report

(<https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/dr-congo-statement-by-leila-zerrougui-on-the-publication-of-report-on-recruitment-of-girls-by-armed-groups/>), have to be addressed.

Support from the international community is essential.

Child protection and Human Rights Training

Child protection training is ongoing with the assistance of the United Nations and support is required to reach members of the Congolese security forces nationally.

Birth registration

Strengthen national birth registration system, with a special emphasis on the registration of the population most vulnerable to recruitment, adolescent boys living in the country's eastern provinces;

Support for the office of the Presidential Special Advisor on sexual violence and child recruitment

The office is engaged in advocacy to strengthen birth registration and to combat impunity for violations against children. Additional legal expertise is needed.



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Parties to conflict listed in the annual report of the Secretary-General

- *Allied Democratic Forces* (recruitment and use, killing and maiming, attacks on school and/or hospitals)
- *Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)* (recruitment and use, sexual violence)
- *Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR)* (recruitment and use, sexual violence, attacks on school and/or hospitals)
- *Forces de résistance patriotiques en Ituri (FRPI)* (recruitment and use, sexual violence, attacks on school and/or hospitals)
- *Lord's Resistance Army* (recruitment and use, killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction)
- *Mayi Mayi Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS) "Colonel Janvier"* (recruitment and use)
- *Union des patriotes congolais pour la paix (UPCP) also known as Mayi Mayi "Lafontaine"* (recruitment and use)
- *Mayi Mayi Simba* (recruitment and use, sexual violence)
- *Mayi Mayi Kata Katanga* (recruitment and use)
- *Nduma Defence of Congo / Cheka* (recruitment and use, killing and maiming)
- *Mayi Mayi Nyatura* (recruitment and use)
- *Raia Mutomboki* (recruitment and use, sexual violence)



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