

International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers

Joint Press Release by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Leila Zerrougui

12 Feb 2017

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini and the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Leila Zerrougui, pledge to intensify their efforts to end the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict.

On the International Day against the Use of Child Soldiers we jointly celebrate a growing global consensus among UN Member States that they should not recruit or use children in armed forces in conflict and that boys and girls should be protected from all grave violations.

"Child soldiers are always the victims: forced to combat, often brutally abused, and not rarely isolated when they finally manage to get back to their communities. I met Colombian boys and girls who have managed to quit the FARC's guerrilla and are now looking at their future with hope. We have the duty to keep supporting them and all the former child soldiers, to give them the chance of a good education and of a place in their societies. At the same time, we will continue to bring forward our engagement in ending the recruitment and use of children by armed forces. Depriving a child of its rights is depriving a society of its future," said Federica Mogherini.

"Armed groups have historically constituted the majority of child recruiters. Positive work and results with Member States – notably through the campaign 'Children, Not Soldiers', are facilitating engagement with non-State actors and as a result, more and more are reaching out to the United Nations to end the recruitment and use and other grave violations against children," said Leila Zerrougui.

Since 2000, over 115,000 child soldiers were released as a result of advocacy and Action Plans. As the mandate of the Special Representative celebrates its twentieth anniversary, the crucial work to end child recruitment has helped to lay the foundation to address all other grave violations. There have been substantial engagement and positive developments to protect schools and hospitals, including through preventing military use, as well as to curb sexual violence in conflict. Support for innovative solutions is also increasing to respond to challenges such as violent extremism and the deprivation of liberty of children.

EU projects funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument are supporting children associated with armed forces and groups, and children impacted by armed violence, including in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Sudan, the Syrian Crisis, Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen. In 2016, the EU allocated over EUR 3 million in humanitarian aid to activities that specifically targeted child soldiers and children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and globally over EUR 23 million was assigned to child protection

activities. Furthermore, in 2016 the EU provided EUR 62 million from its humanitarian budget for education in emergencies, and we will increase this funding in 2017.

Despite continued progress, children growing up in countries affected by conflict are confronted to ever-more complex crises. Children continue to be recruited and used in large numbers in countries such as South Sudan, Iraq, and Nigeria. Protecting children in such difficult contexts requires extensive work and comprehensive approaches. It is also essential to keep building and protecting the peace, even in the midst of crises, through services such as reintegration, education and health.

Continued commitment is needed to ensure that the international community remains effective and responsive to end the use of Child Soldiers worldwide and to hold to account those who continue to do so.

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