



BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL LABOR AFFAIRS

United States Department of Labor

Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking

Children Affected by Armed Conflict

THE SITUATION

The use of child soldiers is well documented and represents one of the worst forms of child labor. Over 300,000 children under the age of 18 are fighting as soldiers for government forces or armed groups in over 30 countries. While some child soldiers are as young as 7, most are between the ages of 14 and 18, with the next largest group being between the ages of 10 and 14. Many children are abducted from their families or from the streets. Orphans, refugees and other displaced children are at particular risk.

Children involved in armed conflicts risk death and serious injury. They are often traumatized by the experience, making it difficult for them to return to an ordinary life. Some children do not directly participate in fighting but are attached to armed units and perform other work that can be hazardous, such as carrying heavy loads and walking long distances. In areas of armed conflict, even children who are not directly involved with armed units suffer as a result of conflicts. They frequently miss years of education and other opportunities to develop social and economic skills. They are also exposed to a variety of other risks, including HIV/AIDS and, in the case of girls, pregnancy and early motherhood.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR RESPONSE

The U.S. Department of Labor's commitment to assist children involved in armed conflict is established under International Labor Organization Convention No. 182, ratified by the U.S. in 1999. The convention identifies the forced or compulsory recruitment of child soldiers, and other work that is harmful to the health, safety or morals of children, as worst forms of child labor. In addition, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao hosted the Children in the Crossfire: Prevention and Rehabilitation of Child Soldiers international conference in May of 2003. The conference raised awareness about the use of child soldiers and promoted solutions in the areas of prevention, demobilization, and reintegration. It served as a unique forum for exchange among some 500 stakeholders from around the world, including donor governments, United Nations agencies, researchers, and the media.

PROGRAMMING AND RESEARCH

The Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor and Human Trafficking at the Department of Labor currently funds over 19 projects to protect children from exploitation and offer them access to educational opportunities in countries experiencing armed conflict or in post-conflict situations.

The Department of Labor has also funded several research projects to define the nature and extent of the child soldier problem. This includes research on child soldiers in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Northern Uganda, the Philippines, the Republic of Congo, and Rwanda.

For more information please visit our Web site at: <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/ocft>