

## CHILD SOLDIERS CAMPAIGN

**G**lobal efforts to end the use of child soldiers continued to advance during the year. Following the United Nations' adoption in May 2000 of a new treaty to end the participation of children under the age of eighteen in armed conflict (an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child), the number of countries signing the treaty grew to eighty-seven, and the number of ratifications increased to ten. Having achieved the ten ratifications needed, the protocol will enter into force on February 12, 2002.

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers continued its campaigning efforts to achieve broad ratification and implementation of the protocol. Coalition members, including national campaigns in many countries, lobbied governments to sign and/or ratify the protocol in advance of the session. Campaign activities in Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Colombia, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Sierra Leone, the United Kingdom, and the United States included public education, exhibitions, media campaigns, petition drives, symposia, street theater, children's demonstrations, marches, meetings with governments, and parliamentary initiatives.

In several countries campaign efforts resulted in changes of laws regulating recruitment. In Italy, sustained campaigning saw the adoption of new legislation raising the minimum age of recruitment to eighteen. In Israel, after persistent NGO efforts, the Israeli Defence Forces announced that it would end the deployment of under-eighteens and stop accepting conscripts before their eighteenth birthday. In East Timor, the National Council adopted military legislation setting eighteen as the minimum age for military recruitment. In Greece, after petitioning by coalition members, a new law was adopted in 2001 that annulled previous legislation that allowed the conscription of under-eighteens. Legislation to prohibit the voluntary recruitment of under-eighteens was also under discussion in the Greek Parliament. In the Netherlands, coalition members worked with members of parliament to introduce a draft bill that would raise the minimum age for recruitment into the Dutch Armed Forces to eighteen.

Support for the efforts to end the use of child soldiers also came from Pope John Paul II, who devoted February 2001 to prayer for an end to the exploitation of children in armed conflict under the theme "Never Again Child Soldiers," and from the World Veterans Federation, which adopted a resolution in December 2000 calling for universal ratification of the protocol.

The Amman Conference on the Use of Child Soldiers was held in Amman, Jordan from April 8-10, 2001 under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdallah. This was the fifth in a series of regional conferences organized by the coalition in order to highlight the worldwide exploitation of children as soldiers and build momentum and effective strategies for a global ban on such abuse.

The conference was attended by representatives of the governments of Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and

Turkey. Participants also included representatives from the Palestinian Authority and more than seventy representatives of local and international NGOs from across the region, national human rights and children's rights institutions, international agencies, and U.N. bodies. At the conclusion of the conference, participants adopted the Amman Declaration on the Use of Children as Soldiers, which strongly condemned the military recruitment and use of children by governments and armed groups across the region, called for prompt ratification and implementation of the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and other international standards, and included a large number of concrete recommendations for follow up in the region.

Prior to and following the Amman conference, the coalition held consultations in Israel with the deputy minister of defense, representatives of the Israeli Defence Forces, Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, members of the Knesset and with non-governmental organizations to discuss military recruitment policy and issues related to the use of children as soldiers in the Middle East.

In June 2001, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers published the first-ever global survey of child soldiers, documenting military recruitment by government armed forces, civil militia, paramilitaries, and non-state armed groups in 180 countries. It found that more than half a million children were recruited into government forces and armed groups in more than eighty-seven countries, and that at least 300,000 of these children were actively fighting in forty-one countries.

The coalition released the report at press conferences in Johannesburg and in New York, where it was also presented to NGO and government delegates to the final preparatory meeting for the U.N. Special Session on Children. National coalitions also released the report from various locations around the world, including Bangkok, Karachi, and Kathmandu; Amman and Beirut; London, Paris, Rome, and Stockholm; and Asuncion and Bogotá.

During the year, the coalition also developed several country programs to strengthen national and regional initiatives by nongovernmental organizations to address the participation of children in armed conflict. In Colombia, national coalition members held a series of successful workshops in conflict zones of the countries, the first series focusing on recruitment prevention with key local actors and the second focusing on indigenous and Afro-Colombian children at risk of recruitment. In Southeast Asia, regional and national NGOs organized a national workshop for the Philippines in Mindanao, bringing together nearly forty NGOs and local government agencies. The workshop assessed trends in the New People's Army, and in Mindanao's separatist and indigenous people's conflicts; prepared a strategic plan for influencing the evolving peace process between the government and armed groups in the country; and created a loose NGO coalition for follow-up. Additional workshops were scheduled to take place before the end of the year in other countries of South and Southeast Asia.

Through its international, regional and national partners, the Coalition also launched a number of targeted campaigning actions during the year, including on the use of child soldiers during the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea; deaths of underage military conscripts in Paraguay; the establishment of a Special Court to try war crimes (including child recruitment) in Sierra Leone; recruitment policy

and practice by the United Kingdom; and child recruitment by government forces and armed groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo and neighboring countries that are party to the conflict.

## HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

**I**n July, Human Rights Watch established its own program dedicated to addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS and human rights. The program will document violations related to HIV/AIDS and advocate for legal and policy protections. The program will work in partnership with NGOs around the world to produce original research on AIDS-related human rights abuses, including in the areas of women's rights, children's rights, rights of migrants and refugees, discrimination on the basis of HIV status, and rights of prisoners.

The prominence of the human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) pandemic on the global policy and aid agendas reached a peak in 2001, but the world's appreciation of AIDS as a human rights crisis still had a long way to go. Human rights abuses that aggravate the HIV/AIDS epidemic were highly prevalent across the globe in 2001, as they have been since the early days of the disease. Addressing AIDS-related human rights abuses remained an undersupported part of national HIV/AIDS programs, compromising the overall effectiveness of national programs. By December 2000, HIV/AIDS had claimed 22 million lives globally, and 36 million persons were infected with the disease, over 70 percent of them in sub-Saharan Africa.

HIV/AIDS is fueled by discrimination and repression in many ways. The subordinate status of women and girls in many settings makes them unable to refuse unsafe or coercive sex. They frequently have less access than their male counterparts to appropriate and accurate information about HIV transmission and the care of persons with AIDS. They also face a variety of legal and cultural impediments to treatment of sexually transmitted disease other than AIDS, which in turn increases their biological vulnerability to HIV transmission. The United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) concluded in a 2001 statement that the HIV/AIDS epidemic would never have attained its catastrophic proportions, especially in Africa, without discrimination against and subordination of women.

Discrimination against gay men, injecting drug users, and sex workers in many countries has marginalized these groups from the preventive services (condoms, clean syringes for drug users, HIV testing and counseling, for example) and treatment they need. Laws and policies favoring obligatory HIV testing and identification of sex partners among some socially marginalized groups have served to drive underground those who most need services. Drug users attempting to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV by participating in needle exchange programs have faced repression and violence in some countries. Prisoners in many parts of the world are subject to sexual violence and are denied services that would help protect them from HIV transmission through drug use.