



The Red Hand Day Campaign

ONE MILLION RED HANDS AGAINST THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

RESOURCE PACK



www.hrw.org

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At **Venice High School**, California, students installed a photo exhibit of child soldiers and invited social studies classes to view the installation. Following their visit, students made 531 red hands and signed large red hands to deliver to their congresswoman’s district office.



The Red Hand Day Campaign

Today, child soldiers are fighting in at least 17 countries around the world. Boys and girls alike are forced into combat, exploited for their labor, and subjected to unspeakable violence. A UN treaty prohibits the participation of children under the age of 18 in hostilities. But too often, it is not enforced.

The aim of the Red Hand Day campaign is to gather one million “red hands”—the symbol of the global campaign against the use of child soldiers—and present them to UN officials in New York on February 12, 2009, the anniversary of the day the treaty banning the use of child soldiers took effect.

Students, youth, children affected by armed conflict, and community and civil society groups from around the world are participating in the campaign in order to highlight the need for stronger international action to end the use of child soldiers.

Background

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers adopted the “red hand” symbol in 1998 as part of its worldwide campaign against the use of child soldiers. Since the treaty banning the use of child soldiers (the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict) entered into force on February 12, 2002, Coalition partners have used this day as “Red Hand” day, with many organizing local events using the red hand to raise awareness about the child soldier issue.

In 2007, Coalition partners in Germany proposed a global campaign to collect one million red hands to present to the UN on February 12, 2009. The campaign encourages participants, particularly schoolchildren, to make hand prints with red ink on A4 (8 1/2 x 11) paper, together with a personal message about their desire to end the use of child soldiers.

Students and other groups in Austria, Belgium, Canada, the DRC, Switzerland, Uganda, the United States, West Africa, and elsewhere, have already begun creating and collecting red hands. In conflict-affected countries, former child soldiers are part of this effort. Many of these groups organized special events on February 12, 2007. Examples of these events can be seen at www.redhandday.org. We are trying to involve children’s and other groups in as many countries around the world as possible.

How to Take Part

Participating in the Red Hand Day Campaign requires only three easy steps:

- 1) Use red paint to make a handprint on a sheet of paper, and add a personal message about your desire to end the use of child soldiers; organize others at your school or in your community to do the same;
- 2) Upload photos or videos of your event to www.redhandday.org;
- 3) Send your red hands by February 2009 to Red Hand Day, Human Rights Watch, 350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor, NY, NY 10118.

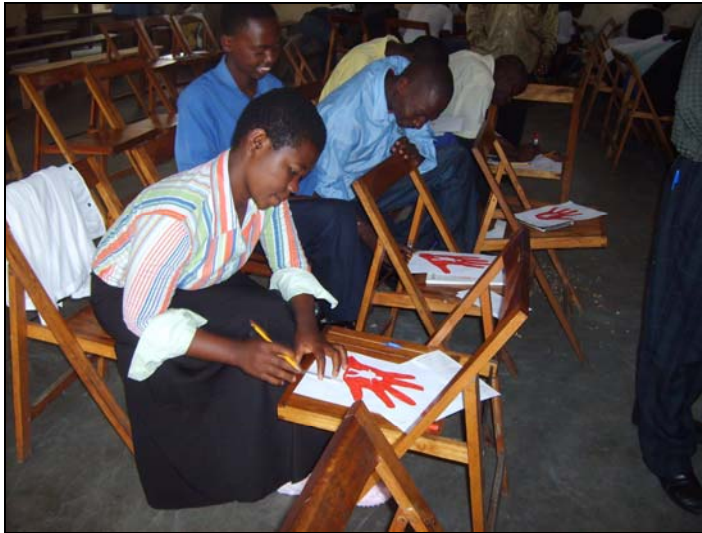
Many schools and community groups have come up with many creative ideas for their Red Hand Day events, including:

- Organizing educational programs on child soldiers at their school, including reading testimonies from former child soldiers;
- Inviting students to sign petitions or letters to their representatives in Congress;
- Delivering red hands to their Congressperson's local office;
- Approaching their City Council to declare February 12 "Red Hand Day";
- Creatively displaying their red hands on the floors, walls, and grounds of their school;
- Holding bake sales with red hand-shaped cookies.

Photos and captions included in this pack illustrate some ideas.



Students at **Santa Monica High School** (California) raised awareness among their student body of over 3,000 students with an action table in their central quad. They encouraged students to make red hands and sign a petition to their local congressman.

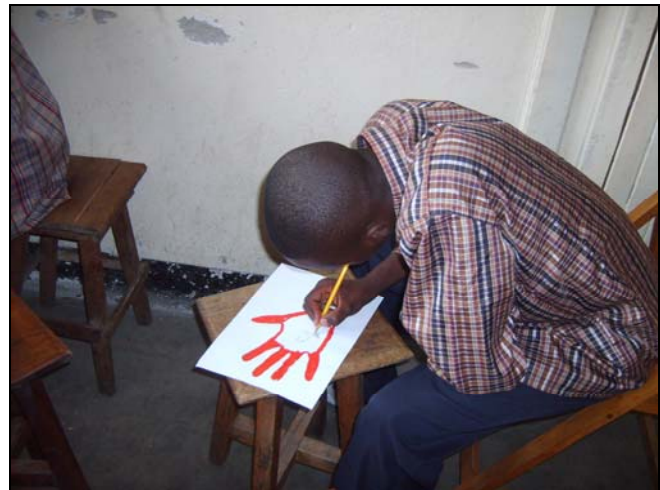


On 12 February 2008 local child protection organizations and hundreds of children in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC) joined thousands of other children and adults around the world for the launch of the Red Hand Day Campaign.

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In Goma, north Kivu, **DRC** (a province currently affected by recruitment of children) eleven child protection organizations and over 50 children (including many former child soldiers) and local authorities met to review the situation and listen to the testimony of a former child soldier during Red Hand day activities.

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Students in Schönwalde, **Germany** participate in the Red Hand Campaign.

Facts about Child Soldiers

- Thousands of children under the age of 18 are currently fighting in wars in at least 17 countries worldwide. Some are as young as eight years old.
- Child soldiers serve in government armies, opposition (rebel) forces, and government-linked militias and paramilitaries.
- Once recruited, child soldiers may serve as porters or cooks, guards, messengers or spies. Many are pressed into combat, where they may be forced to the front lines or sent into minefields ahead of older troops. Some children have been used for suicide missions.
- Children are sometimes forced to commit atrocities against their own family or neighbors. Such practices help ensure that the child is "stigmatized" and unable to return to his or her home community.
- Children are uniquely vulnerable to military recruitment because of their emotional and physical immaturity. They are easily manipulated and can be drawn into violence that they are too young to resist or understand.
- Technological advances in weaponry and the proliferation of small arms have contributed to the increased use of child soldiers. Lightweight automatic weapons are simple to operate, often easily accessible, and can be used by children as easily as adults.
- Many children join armed groups because of economic or social pressure, or because children believe that the group will offer food or security. Others are forcibly recruited, "press-ganged" or abducted by armed groups.
- Both girls and boys are used as child soldiers. In some countries, like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Uganda, a third or more of the child soldiers were reported to be girls. In some conflicts, girls may be raped, or given to military commanders as "wives."
- In some countries, former child soldiers can get assistance to help them locate their families, get back into school, receive vocational training, and re-enter civilian life. However, many children have no access to such programs. They may have no way to support themselves and are at risk of re-recruitment.



At **Space Coast High School (Cocoa, Florida)** over 700 students participated in a lunchtime activity, filling a roll of paper 150 feet long with red hands. They are engaging other groups in their community, with the goal of completing rolls of red hands that, when combined, will stretch over 2,000 feet.



Students at **Wildwood School** covered the school's hallways with red hands and facts about child soldiers. Education was a key element of their actions; during the school's advisory period, all 9th-12th graders made red hands while students read the testimonies of former child soldiers.

Photo: Maya Myers

Country Examples and Children's Stories

SRI LANKA

During a twenty-year civil war, an armed ethnic separatist group known as the Tamil Tigers has recruited thousands of children to fight against government forces. The Tamil Tigers have deployed children in mass attacks during major battles, and have used them as infantry soldiers, security and intelligence officers, and medics. Some children, particularly girls, have been used for suicide missions.

The Tamil Tigers routinely visit Tamil families, telling them that they must offer a son or daughter to serve as a soldier. If the family refuses, the Tamil Tigers will make repeated visits to threaten and intimidate the family. Parents may be told that if they do not offer one child, another will be taken, or that they themselves will be detained. If a family continues to resist, the Tamil Tigers may show up in the middle of the night and drag a child away, or will pick them up as they walk to school. Parents who try to interfere are often beaten.

The LTTE generally targets children of about 14 or 15, although they also take children as young as 11 or 12. Over 40 percent of their child soldiers are girls. Since 2002, UNICEF has documented over 6,000 cases of child recruitment by the Tamil Tigers.

Nirmala's story:

Nirmala was 14 when the Tamil Tigers began to visit her house. They came 3 or 4 times, and each time, they said that every house had to give a child for the cause. Nirmala's parents refused. The Tamil Tigers responded by saying, "If you don't give a child, we will force you out of your house."

One afternoon the Tamil Tigers arrived just after Nirmala had returned from school. They took her by force, together with over 30 other children and youth from her village. She was given military training together with children as young as 12 and 13. She learned to use bombs and landmines and said the hardest part was heavy arms training and using rocket-propelled grenade launchers.

She told Human Rights Watch about drills where the children were supposed to find hidden claymore mines. If they failed to find all of the mines, as a punishment, they would be forced to run for more than an hour.

Nirmala said many people tried to escape, but that when they were caught, the whole unit was lined up to watch them get beaten. She said that on some occasions the person beaten died. She talked with other children about trying to escape, but when she saw others being beaten, not surprisingly, she changed her mind. She was able to leave the Tamil Tigers in 2004, but when Human Rights Watch interviewed her a few months later, she was terribly frightened of being re-recruited.

For more information, see

"Living in Fear: Child Soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka" (2004)

<http://hrw.org/reports/2004/srilanka1104/>

"Complicit in Crime: State Collusion in Abductions and Child Recruitment by the Karuna Group" (2007) <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2007/01/23/complicit-crime>

BURMA

Burma is ruled by a military dictatorship. In 1988, the regime crushed large-scale pro-democracy demonstrations, and since that time, it has rapidly expanded its army in order to control the civilian population and fight armed ethnic opposition groups based near the edges of the country.

To fill its ranks, the national army recruits large numbers of boys. Soldiers typically approach children at markets, train stations, festivals or on the streets and demand to see their identity cards. If a child cannot produce one, he is told that they must either join the army, or go to jail. If the children continue to refuse, they may be beaten or detained until they agree. In some cases, soldiers recruit children as young as 11 years old.

Boys are routinely beaten during training, and brutally punished if they try to run away. Once deployed, they are forced to fight against Burma's ethnic minorities and other opposition forces, and to carry out human rights abuses, such as burning houses, rounding up villagers for forced labor, and even massacring civilians.

Aung's story

When Aung was 11 years old he was traveling to his house from his aunt's when he was picked up by recruiters from the army. They asked him if he wanted to join the army. He said, "No, I'm too young." But they told him that he could either join the army or go to jail for six years. They locked him up for several hours, giving him time to decide. Finally, believing he had no choice, he agreed to join the army.

During training Aung was repeatedly beaten. He said he cried at night because he missed his parents. He was never allowed to contact them. He was only 12 when he was sent into combat for the first time. He said he was scared, so he hid his face and fired his gun into the air. He said he was afraid his commander would punish him if he didn't shoot. When he was still only 13, he saw members of his unit massacre a group of 15 women and children.

Aung talked to Human Rights Watch when he was 14. He had fled the army and escaped across the border into Thailand. He had few choices. One was to join one of the opposition forces and fight against the army. Another was to get an illegal job in Thailand and hope that he wouldn't be picked up and returned to Burmese authorities. He couldn't go home without putting his family at risk or risking arrest. That encounter with a recruiter when he was 11 ended up changing his life forever.

For more information:

"My Gun was as Tall as Me: Child Soldiers in Burma" (2002), <http://hrw.org/reports/2002/burma/>
"Sold to be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma" (2007)
<http://www.hrw.org/en/node/10621/section/1>

NORTHERN UGANDA

For twenty years the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has fought against the Ugandan government. The LRA has kidnapped more than 30,000 children to serve as soldiers, laborers and sex slaves. Children abducted by the LRA are forced to carry out raids, beat and kill civilians, and abduct other children. They are forced to beat or trample to death other children who attempt to escape, and are repeatedly told that they will be killed if they try to run away. Girls are often given to commanders as "wives" and subjected to rape, unwanted pregnancies, and HIV/AIDS. An estimated 85 percent of LRA soldiers were abducted as children.

Charlotte's story

Charlotte is from a village in Northern Uganda. One night when she was 14 and asleep in her dorm at a Catholic boarding school, rebel soldiers from the Lord's Resistance Army attacked the school. The LRA took Charlotte, along with 139 other girls from her school. They marched her to a military camp in Sudan. There, she joined thousands of other children in the LRA's military camps. Charlotte was threatened with death if she tried to escape, was trained to fight, and given to an older rebel as a "wife." She gave birth to two children while in the bush, and nearly died delivering her first son.

Charlotte's story has a happy ending. After eight years in captivity, her oldest son went missing during a battle. She was distraught, but a few days later she saw an opportunity. When her guards were not looking, she took her youngest child and managed to escape. Miraculously, when she found some Army soldiers, they told her they had already located her older child. She and her children have been reunited with her family, and Charlotte is now back in school.

See "Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda" (2003)
<http://hrw.org/reports/2003/uganda0303/>

COLOMBIA

Thousands of children serve in Colombia's irregular armed groups. The majority serve in the FARC guerillas, with smaller numbers in the UC-ELN guerillas. Children also serve in pro-government paramilitary forces.

Many children join up for food or physical protection, to escape domestic violence, or because of promises of money. Some are forced to join at gunpoint, or join out of fear. Others are street children with nowhere to go. Children as young as thirteen are trained to use assault rifles, grenades and mortars. Some are even younger. Adult commanders order children to kill, mutilate and torture. Children who try to desert may be executed by their comrades.

Adolfo's story:

"[The paramilitaries] have guys who do the recruiting, guys who come up and talk to you, like they say," I just want to know that you can kill because we need some people to take back with us, and you'll earn such and such an amount." So you say yes, OK, to the guy and the guy gives you the money up front and tells you that he'll be back for you on such and such a day, or tomorrow at such and such an hour. You have to be there. If not, they'll kill you for sure.

[During training] the guys that come in are professional soldiers . . . they are there watching, they go onto the track and hit you with sticks and clubs while you're running. Sometimes there are accidents and people get killed. You regret you joined in those three months, because it's tough as a son-of-a-bitch. You only rest when they give you the uniform and the gun and you're ready for the counter-guerilla.

I was really scared at first. The first test they give you is to kill a man, a guerilla. Bring me so and so, they say, so that he can learn. And they bring you and tell you to kill the man. If you don't kill him, they will kill you. They used to bring guerillas captured in Caquetá to the camp, and tie them up by the hands and legs and a man would come up with a chainsaw and slice them piece by piece. Everybody could watch. I must have seen it ten times. It's part of the training."

See "You'll Learn Not to Cry: Child Combatants in Colombia" (2003), <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/colombia0903/>

RIGHT: A fifth grade class in Floh-Seligenthal, **Germany** begins their presentation of the “Red Hand” campaign to stop of the use of child soldiers. Using a format similar to a TV news program, the children present basic facts, statistics, and background on the use of child soldiers in order to raise awareness and spur audiences to action. Their presentation helped many other students and teachers at the school to get involved in the campaign.



BELOW: At Pacific Palisades Charter High **(California)** students raised awareness on their campus by “planting” gardens of red hands in the quad, and collecting red hands as part of the red hands campaign. They also collected signatures on a petition to their congressman, urging him to do more in the U.S. Congress to punish people who recruit or use child soldiers and to block U.S. military funding to countries whose government forces use child soldiers.



Where Children are Fighting

Child soldiers are being used to fight in the following 17 countries:

Afghanistan – Insurgent groups, including the Taliban and other armed groups, use child soldiers, including in suicide attacks. According to some reports, children are also present in the Afghan National Army.

Burma – Thousands of boys serve in Burma’s national army, with children as young as 11 forcibly recruited off the streets. Children also serve with some of the armed ethnic opposition groups.

Central African Republic -- Hundreds of children, some as young as 12, serve with rebel groups, including the APRD, UFDR and FDPC.

Cote d’Ivoire — Rebel forces and militia groups linked to the government used child soldiers until early 2007, but have now demobilized children from their ranks.

Chad – An estimated 7,000-10,000 children are fighting with the Chadian armed forces and Chadian and Sudanese rebel forces. Many children have been recruited from refugee and displaced persons camps.

Colombia- Thousands of children serve in Colombia’s irregular armed groups. The majority serve in the FARC guerrillas, with smaller numbers in the UC-ELN guerrillas. The number of children in pro-government paramilitary forces is currently unknown, though recruitment is ongoing.

Democratic Republic of Congo – Thousands of children serve in government forces (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC)), as well as the rebel Forces Démocratiques de Liberation de Rwanda (FDLR) and other armed groups and militias. At the height of DRC’s war, the UN estimated that more than 30,000 children were fighting with various parties to the conflict. Most have now been released or demobilized, but active recruitment continues in the east of the country.

India –Naxalite rebels in Chattisgarh use children as soldiers. Government security forces employ children as “special police officers” in anti-insurgency operations.

Iraq – Insurgent groups use children as combatants to plant roadside bombs and act as decoys in suicide car bombings.

Nepal – Thousands of children were recruited and used by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) forces prior to a November 2006 peace agreement, and have not yet been released.

Occupied Palestinian Territories - Fatah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine have all used children as messengers, couriers, and in some cases, fighters. At least ten children have carried out suicide attacks in Israel or the Occupied Territories since 2000.

Philippines – Children are recruited by rebel forces, including the New People’s Army, Abu Sayyaf Group, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Child recruitment is also reported by some paramilitary forces linked to the government.

Somalia – Thousands of child soldiers are part of factional militias in Somalia and were used in intense fighting in 2006 and 2007.

Sri Lanka – The rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have recruited thousands of children as soldiers throughout Sri Lanka’s 20-year civil war. Since 2002, UNICEF has documented LTTE recruitment of over 6,000 children, although recruitment rates dropped significantly in 2007. The Karuna Group, an armed group with military support fighting against the LTTE, has abducted hundreds of children as soldiers since 2006.

Sudan – Thousands of children fight with the Sudan Armed Forces and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army. In Darfur, the Sudan Armed Forces, the Janjaweed militias, Sudan Liberation Army factions and paramilitary forces all use child soldiers. The Lord’s Resistance Army also has child soldiers in Sudan.

Thailand—Separatist insurgents called Pejuang Kemerdekaan Patani (Patani Freedom Fighters) have recruited hundreds of ethnic Malay Muslim children as messengers, couriers, scouts, and in some cases, combatants, in the increasingly violent insurgency in Thailand’s southern border provinces. Recent reports indicate that some paramilitary forces linked to Thai authorities, such as Ruam Thai Group (Thai United Group), recruit and provide military training to Buddhist Thai children.

Uganda - Over the past 20 years, the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has abducted more than 30,000 boys and girls as soldiers, often forcing girls into sexual slavery. Although many have died in battle or been released, an unknown number are still held in camps in Sudan. The government has recruited children into its forces, including Local Defense Units.



Students at **Wildwood School** covered the school’s hallways with red hands and facts about child soldiers.

Photo: Maya Myers

International Law Regarding the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers

1977:

Additional Protocols to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 : Sets fifteen as the minimum age for recruitment or use in armed conflict. This minimum standard applies to all parties, both governmental and non-governmental, in both international and internal armed conflict and is now considered “customary international law”.

1989:

Convention on the Rights of the Child: Also sets the age of fifteen as the minimum age for recruitment or participation in armed conflict. The Convention is the most widely ratified convention in the world, with 192 states parties.

1990:

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: The only regional treaty in the world that addresses the issue of child soldiers. It states that no one under the age of 18 should take a direct part in hostilities and that states should refrain from recruiting any child.

1998:

Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court:

Establishes a permanent court to try persons charged with committing war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The statute includes “conscripting or enlisting children under the age of fifteen year into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities” as a war crime. As of December 2008, the Court had charged 7 individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda with recruiting and using child soldiers.

1999:

Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention 182 : Prohibits the forced or compulsory recruitment of children under the age of 18 for use in armed conflict and defines it as one of the worst forms of child labor. Over 150 countries have ratified the convention. The United States ratified in 1999.

2000:

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict: Sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for recruitment into armed groups, and for compulsory recruitment by governments. It has been ratified by over 120 countries. The United States ratified it in 2002.



Students from Berufskolleg-Kleve in Kleve, Germany display their banner of red hands.



Students at **Crossroads School** used a bake sale to capture their peers' attention. They sold red hand cookies and wore red hand t-shirts to attract crowds to their action table, where students signed petitions to their congressman and made red hands. They also held a short program that included facts about child soldiers and testimonies.



In February 2008, four members of the Human Rights Watch student task force in **Los Angeles** submitted a resolution to the City Council to declare Red Hand Day in the City of Los Angeles. After their presentations, the City Council passed their resolution unanimously.