

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/28/dispatches-mixed-us-report-child-soldiers>

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Yesterday the United States State Department released a new [snapshot](#) of how governments around the world are doing in ending their use of child soldiers. Its 2015 list names eight governments Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for recruiting or using children in their armed forces, or supporting militias or other armed groups that use child soldiers.

There are a few hopeful developments. The number of countries named is down from a high of 10 in 2013, and the State Department notes that child recruitment is decreasing in several countries, including Burma, Congo, and Somalia. In fact, in Congo, only a single new case of child recruitment by government forces was reported last year a huge change from years of child soldier use though some military commanders reportedly provide financial and military support to armed groups still using children.

The US should send a clear message governments using child soldiers will not be let off the hook. To receive US military aid, they need to stop the use of child soldiers

But theres bad news too. [Nigeria](#) was added to the list for the first time this year because a government-affiliated militia, the Civilian Joint Task force, has recruited and used child soldiers sometimes by force in the fight against the Islamist militant group Boko Haram. In [Yemen](#) the Houthi armed group increased recruitment of children after overthrowing the government in September 2014; UNICEF, the United Nations Childrens Fund, has [estimated](#) that one-third of all fighters in the country were children. Perhaps most discouragingly, [South Sudan](#) has reversed its progress in ending use of child soldiers. As the country plunged back into conflict in December 2013, some army commanders conducted large-scale recruitment of children.

President Barack Obama now has about two months to decide whether to let congressionally imposed military sanctions go into effect against the five named governments that are slated for US military assistance next year. His decision in the past to withhold key military assistance from Congo almost certainly contributed to the notable progress by that country. But in too many other cases, he has invoked national interests to waive the law and allow governments using child soldiers to continue receiving US military aid.

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