

Human Rights Watch

Children's Rights

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/06/14/us-step-pressure-allies-using-child-soldiers>

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New US Report Names Six Governments That Could Lose Military Aid

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(New York) - The United States should put pressure on governments identified by the State Department as using child soldiers to end the practice or lose US military assistance, Human Rights Watch said today.

The State Department's 2010 annual report on Trafficking in Persons, issued today, identifies six governments involved in the recruitment and use of child soldiers. A US law enacted in 2008 prohibits several categories of US military assistance to such governments, effective October 1, 2010, unless the president invokes a national interest waiver.

"Americans don't want their tax money used to put weapons into the hands of children," said Jo Becker, children's rights advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. "Cutting off US military assistance to countries using child soldiers should make their governments think twice about exploiting children for warfare."

The new trafficking report cited Burma, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen for using child soldiers in their armed forces or supporting allied militias that use child soldiers. Except for Burma, each of these countries has received US military assistance in recent years, usually in the form of military training.

The Child Soldiers Prevention Act was adopted by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2008. It prohibits foreign military financing, military training, and several other categories of US military assistance to governments using child soldiers, based on the findings of the Trafficking in Persons report.

In 2009, the US sent approximately 40 tons of arms and ammunition - including mortars and mortar shells - to the Transitional Government of Somalia, which according to the trafficking report recruits children by force and deception into militias associated with the transitional government and its allied forces. For Yemen, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates in December 2009 approved more than doubling US military funding - from US\$67 million to \$150 million - to train and equip Yemeni security forces, which also recruit child soldiers, according to the report. The State Department also requested \$1.1 million under the International Military Education and Training program for Yemen for 2011, the same as for 2010, and \$35 million in Foreign Military Financing, an increase of \$22.5 million over 2010.

The US also has provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in military training to Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and forces in South Sudan.

On June 16, the United Nations Security Council will debate a report issued by the UN secretary-general in May that identified more than 50 government and non-state armed groups in 13 countries that use child soldiers in violation of international law. The secretary-general identified 16 groups or forces as "persistent violators" that had recruited child soldiers for at least five years or more, including the government armed forces of Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, and the Sudan People's Liberation Army. The report for the first time mentioned Yemen as a country where children are used in warfare.

In resolutions adopted in 2004, 2005, and 2009, the Security Council pledged to consider targeted measures, including arms embargoes and other sanctions, against parties to armed conflict that refused to end their use of child soldiers.

"The US and other governments need to step up their response to end the use of child soldiers," Becker said. "Armed forces and rebel groups that continue year after year to use children as soldiers should face severe consequences, including sanctions."

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