Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1215 (2000)[1]

Campaign against the enlistment of child soldiers and their participation in armed conflicts

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly supports the action carried out for many years by its Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee to defend and promote children's rights; it confirms its strong commitment to further their cause, be they children from within or outside Europe, as already stated in its Recommendation 1286 (1996) on a European strategy for children.

2. In the modern world, children are involved in armed conflicts in about fifty countries; they are most often victims of them and sometimes also combatants enlisted or conscripted in contempt of their rights, their physical integrity and their lives. 300 000 child soldiers of under 18 years of age, girls and boys, are thought to be taking part in armed conflicts all over the world. The recent conflicts in Europe, in Bosnia and Kosovo yesterday and Chechnya today, provide evidence of this.

3. The phenomenon is growing as a result of changes in the nature of conflicts, most of which are lengthy civil wars, or wars between adjoining regions, fought with inexpensive, light firearms. Once enlisted, children become instruments of war. The legal rules governing armed conflicts are not observed and even states with a longstanding democratic tradition do not protect children's rights as they should.

4. It is the duty of the Council of Europe member states to react if they do not wish to see barbarism invade their societies and lose their common fundamental values. The international community cannot wait for a hypothetical consensus to end the arms trade; it must reply by declaring the forced enlistment of child soldiers of under 18 to be illegal, in the same way that anti-personnel mines were banned.

5. The Assembly therefore calls upon the member states of the Council of Europe and states enjoying observer status with the Council of Europe:

5.1. to undertake to end permanently in their own countries the enlistment and participation of children under 18 years of age, both girls and boys, in armed forces and in armed conflicts, by modifying their legislation and current practice if necessary;

5.2. to express this undertaking at international level by ratifying:

a. International Labour Organisation Convention No. 182 (1999) on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, which forbids, alongside slavery, the sale of children, serfdom etc., the forced or compulsory enlistment of children for use in armed conflicts;

b. the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that would forbid the recruitment and participation in armed conflict of all children below the age of 18;

c. the Rome Statute (1998) setting up the International Criminal Court to judge war crimes and crimes against humanity;

d. the two additional protocols to the 1949 Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of armed conflict;

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1. Assembly debate on 7 April 2000 (16th Sitting) (see Doc. 8676, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mrs Pozza Tasca; and Doc. 8696, opinion of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Tabajdi). Text adopted by the Assembly on 7 April 2000 (16thSitting).

e. the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto.

6. The Assembly invites the Unites States of America to immediately ratify the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

7. The Assembly calls upon states that have signed and ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and especially Council of Europe member states, to support, in particular through voluntary contributions, the Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict appointed by the Secretary General of the UN as one of his initiatives and actions to eradicate this phenomenon.

8. The Assembly also urges Council of Europe member states and states enjoying Observer status with the Council of Europe:

8.1. to allow and foster, everywhere and at all times, access to humanitarian aid for the civilian population in the event of armed conflict, taking particular account of children's needs;

8.2. to give priority to the protection of children in processes to restore peace and in post-war co-operation programmes, whether bilateral or multilateral or conducted by international organisations.

9. The Assembly calls upon states that have signed and ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to draw up policies to aid development in countries where there is conflict, in order to:

9.1. stop the recruitment of child soldiers and demobilise those who have already been enlisted;

9.2. ensure that measures are taken for these children's physical, psychological and social rehabilitation;

9.3. foster their reintegration into civilian life and, in particular, into a suitable education system.

10. Finally, the Assembly urges states that have signed and ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to promote education for peace and tolerance through awareness-raising campaigns, particularly in countries where the risk of conflict is high.

11. The Assembly invites the member states of the Council of Europe and states enjoying Observer status within the Council of Europe to implement the decision by the UN Secretary General to set the minimum age of recruits in national units participating in United Nations peacekeeping forces at 18 years.

12. The Assembly also invites governments of member states and states enjoying Observer status within the Council of Europe implementing the debt relief agreements concluded by creditor countries at a multilateral level to make cancellation of a country's foreign debt conditional on its undertaking to:

12.1. ratify the protocol to the Untied Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and effectively apply the ban on enlistment of under-eighteens and their participation in armed conflicts;

12.2. employ in civilian activities any children or young people below the age of 18 who have already been recruited.