



**RESOLUTION ON
YOUTH IN CONFLICT AND CHILD
SOLDIERS**

**Adopted by the Executive Committee,
3-5 April 1998, Vilnius, Lithuania**

Considering that:

- War is particularly severe on women and children, who constitute approximately eighty percent of the displaced in Africa. A 1996 World Bank report explains that conflicts have impoverished countries in every major region, in many cases wiping out the achievements of decades of economic and social development.
- The commitment of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe expressed in Resolution 72, to the protection of children in the event of war.
- Human Rights Watch as well as the study "Children, the invisible soldiers" by Brett & Mc Callin estimate that at least 250,000 children under the age of 18 now serve in governments armies or armed rebel groups in more than 30 countries world-wide.
- In most countries, citizens younger than 18 are not allowed to vote and thus are excluded from political participation.
- The ILO-standard on child labour, which states that the minimum age for work likely to jeopardise health, safety or morals of young persons is 18 years and the interpretation that participation in armed conflicts is hazardous.
- The abuse of children and child soldiers in conflict zones is not only a problem of countries in the South, but is also present in Europe including Northern Ireland, Chechnya, Albania, Kurdistan and Croatia.
- A UN report, titled "Impact of Armed Conflicts on Children" by Graça Machel, released in 1996, blamed the world's arms manufacturers for mass-producing inexpensive light weapons making it tragically easy for children to be recruited and trained as soldiers. Moreover, she states that the participation of children is one of the most alarming trends in armed conflicts.
- Olara A. Otunnu, the special representative of the UN Secretary General for children and armed conflicts, is appointed to make a plea for a global information campaign on the situation of child soldiers and children in war zones. The study "Girls and War zones" of Carolyn Nordstrom spotlights the situation of girl-victims and girl-soldiers in wartime, often hidden from the international community.

- Since 1994, a UN Working Group has tried to push for an optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which would raise the minimum age for military recruitment from the present 15 to 18 years of age.

And referring to:

1. The mandate of the European Youth Forum that aims to:

- be consulted by international institutions on all issues relevant to young people and to youth organisations;
- influence the policy of international institutions on youth related issues;
- promote the development of mutual understanding and the struggle for equal rights;
- support and co-ordinate the work of its member organisations.

1. The recommendations of the European Conference "Youth Ways out of Conflict", Belfast, 4-9 November 1997, adopted during the Executive Meeting of the European Youth Forum in Budapest, Hungary, November 21 1997, to:

- Raise the issue of conflict prevention and resolution in relation to young people to the European Union, Council of Europe and the UN as appropriate;
- Lobby the UN in co-operation with member organisations to change the legal age of people who can be recruited as soldiers from 15 to 18 years old.

1. The decision of the Flemish Platform for International Youth Work of 3/3/98 to participate in a global campaign on the situation of child soldiers.

The European Youth Forum encourages the relevant institutions and member organisations to support the following statements and recommendations:

- 1. States shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities as part of their armed forces;**
- 2. States shall ensure that persons who have not attained the age of 18 years are not compulsory or voluntarily recruited into their armed forces;**

- 3. Persons under the age of 18 years should not be recruited into armed groups, distinct from the armed forces of a State nor to take part in hostilities. States shall take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and participation;**
- 4. To participate in a global campaign on light weapons and the situation of child soldiers;**
- 5. To prevent and alarm the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and its consequences to children and youth in conflict-prone regions by concrete actions, informing decision-makers, petitions, youth games and manifestations.**
- 6. To encourage different initiatives to release and protect children and youth from the consequences of war, i.e. demobilisation and reintegration programmes, micro-disarmament initiatives (mine-cleaning, etc), conflict prevention measures.**