

02/07/01

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BS-495/01 sign

Motion for a resolution

Tabled by: Mr. Collins, Mrs Muscardini, Mr Camre, Mr. Andrews, Mr. Crowley, Mr. Gallagher, Mr. Fitzsimons,
Mr. Hyland , UEN

On the UN Special Session on children 19-21 September 2001 and the need to ratify the UN Optional Protocol on Child Soldiers

Pursuant to Rule 50 of the Rules of Procedure

The European Parliament

- A. whereas in September 2001 a Special Session on Children is scheduled to take place at the UN to explore ways if improving the rights of children and young people world-wide and is an important follow-up to the 1990 World Summit for Children at which 71 Heads of State and Government and other leaders signed the World Declaration on Survival, Protection and Development of Children and adopted a Plan of Action to achieve a set of precise, time-bound goals,
- B. whereas the objective of the Special Session in September is to review the progress made for children in the decade since the holding of the World Summit,
- C. whereas while UNICEF reports evidence of real progress as regards achieving the Summit goal of reducing the mortality rate among children under five by between one third in 63 countries and by one fifth in 100 countries resulting in the saving of as many as one million lives and while more than 100 million children are now immunised annually, saving more than 3 million lives every year, there have also been serious setbacks,
- D. whereas these setbacks include: preventing the death of millions of children from preventable causes, malnutrition, a shortfall in school education enrolments, more particularly for girls, inadequate investment in social services, the impact of hazardous labour, the sale and trafficking of women and children as well as the militarisation and prostitution of children and whereas they represent a major challenge for the countries which signed the UN Plan of Action and the Member States of the European Union,

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- E. whereas on 25 May 2000 the UN General Assembly adopted an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict,
- F. whereas the new Protocol establishes 18 as the minimum age for participation in armed conflict, for any compulsory recruitment and for any recruitment or use in armed conflict by armed groups,
- G. whereas previously children as young as fifteen could be legally recruited and deployed in armed conflict,
- H. whereas it has been estimated that at any one time as many as 300,000 children under 18, girls and boys, are currently participating in armed conflicts in more than thirty countries around the world and that in certain cases recruitment involves children aged 10 or even younger,
- I. whereas the International Labour Organisation (ILO) regards the forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict as among the worst forms of child labour,
- J. whereas the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which entered into force in November 1999, prohibits the recruitment or direct participation in hostilities or internal strife of anyone under the age of 18,
- K. whereas while to date 79 countries have signed the Optional Protocol, including all 15 EU Member States, it has only been ratified by 4 countries, Andorra, Bangladesh, Canada and Sri Lanka and whereas the Protocol cannot come into force until it has been ratified by 10 countries,
- L. whereas last year the UN estimated that 5,400 child combatants were awaiting disarmament and demobilisation in Sierra Leone but concerns have been expressed that the number could be much higher,
- M. whereas according to aid agencies the demobilisation of Sudanese child soldiers by UNICEF earlier this year turned into an operational nightmare with families forcing children to participate in the scheme who had no right to do so, food ran out and there was a breakdown in discipline,

1. Stresses its continuing commitment to defending and promoting the rights of the child in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and, in this regard, draws attention to and welcomes the UN's plan to hold a Special Session on Children in September;
2. Calls on the Council and the Commission within the possibilities allowed for under the Treaties to play a leading role in promoting the rights of children and young people at this Special Session and to work for a global agenda aimed at tackling the setbacks identified above so that children world-wide can face the future with hope and in safety ;
3. Considers that any commitment to specific action over the coming years must be matched by the necessary human and economic resources;
4. Believes that the Member States and other countries should do everything possible between now and September to speed up the universal ratification of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict so that the entry into force of the Optional Protocol which lays the basis for a global ban on the use of child soldiers can be announced at the UN Special Session on Children;
5. Believes that the Optional Protocol represents a strong expression of the international consensus against the use of children in all conflict situations and underlines the fundamental premise that children, boys and girls, simply have no part in warfare;
6. Endorses the call for monitoring and reporting on child rights violations to be included in the mandate of all UN field and peacekeeping operations and considers that effective and evolving strategies need to be developed aimed at ensuring that children everywhere enjoy their full rights under the UN Convention and the Optional Protocol and that they are placed at the centre of all humanitarian, peacemaking and peace-building efforts, including all relevant EU actions;
7. Instructs its President to forward its resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Member States, the Governments of the applicant countries and the United Nations.

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