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Trafficking in children and child soldiers

European Parliament resolution on trafficking in children and child soldiers

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989, entered into force in 1990, and has been ratified by all the Member States and accession countries,
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 10 December 2002, endorsing the report of the Council Working Group on Human Rights (COHOM) on ‘Implementation of the follow-up to the General Affairs Council conclusions of 25 June 2001’,
- having regard to UN Security Council Resolutions 1379 of 20 November 2001 and 1460 of 30 January 2003 on children and armed conflict,
- having regard to the new international standards and instruments enhancing child protection, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel mines, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and ILO Convention 182 on the prohibition and immediate action for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour,
- having regard to the UN Millennium Declaration (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals, subscribed to by all UN Member States,
- having regard to the World Education Forum in Dakar and its outcome document, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments (2000),
- having regard to its previous resolutions on children's rights and on child soldiers, and in particular those of 17 December 1998 on child soldiers¹, 28 January 1999 on the protection of families and children², 18 November 1999 on the tenth anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child³, 6 July 2000 on child soldiers in Uganda⁴, 17 May 2001 on child trafficking in Africa⁵, 6 September 2001 on the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly⁶ and 11 April 2002 on the EU position in the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly⁷,

¹ OJ C 98, 9.4.1999, p. 297.

² OJ C 128, 7.5.1999, p. 79.

³ OJ C 189, 7.7.2000, p. 241.

⁴ OJ C 121, 24.4.2001, p. 401.

⁵ OJ C 34 E, 7.2.2002, p. 383.

⁶ OJ C 72 E, 21.3.2002, p. 360.

⁷ OJ C 127 E, 29.5.2003, p. 691.

- having regard to the resolutions of the EU-ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly of 1 April 1999¹ and 23 March 2000² on child soldiers and of 21 March 2002³ on health issues,
- A. whereas the scale of trafficking in children and the enrolment of children in fighting units is on the increase; whereas certain categories of children are particularly vulnerable, in particular children not attending school, young girls, ethnic minorities, street children and children orphaned by Aids,
- B. whereas, at international level, the number of children who are victims of trafficking each year is put at more than 1.2 million, a figure ten times higher than the numbers involved when the slave trade with the United States was at its peak,
- C. whereas there is a link between poverty and the emergence of trafficking in children; whereas the focus must be on combating poverty if trafficking in children is to be eliminated,
- D. whereas this scourge takes on its most tragic proportions in West Africa where, according to UNICEF, 200 000 children are trafficked each year,
- E. whereas the term trafficking in children covers the recruitment, transport, displacement, housing or reception of a child with a view to its sexual exploitation, the exploitation of its labour, forced labour or slavery,
- F. whereas more than 300 000 children aged under 18, both boys and girls, are currently enrolled in units fighting on behalf of government forces and/or the armed opposition in more than 30 countries, including northern Uganda, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Angola, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya,
- G. whereas this issue has been the focus of international concern, marked, in particular, by the Special Session on Children of the UN General Assembly and its outcome document, ‘A World Fit for Children’ (10 May 2002), the entry into force on 18 January 2002 of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and the entry into force on 12 February 2002 of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict,
- H. whereas some of the worst abuses of child soldiers exist in the Great Lakes region, with more than 20 000 children having been abducted and forced into battle by the Lord’s Resistance Army in northern Uganda and an estimated 17 000 children fighting in the Ituri region in eastern Congo,
- I. whereas the ‘Libreville Declaration’, adopted in 2002 by 21 African countries, demonstrates that the states worst affected by trafficking are aware of the problem, and are determined to combat it together,

¹ OJ C 271, 24.9.1999, p. 46.

² OJ C 263, 13.9.2000, p. 42.

³ OJ C 231, 27.9.2002, pp. 55 and 57.

- J. whereas European Union measures in this area are completely inadequate, and no longer have budgetary priority, as shown by the decreasing number of projects funded (10 in 1999 and two in 2002),
1. Calls on all the Member States to sign, ratify and immediately implement the international legal instruments which guarantee protection of children's rights, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, the Ottawa Treaty banning anti-personnel mines, the Statutes of the International Criminal Court, ILO Convention 182 and the additional protocol to the United Nations Convention on international organised crime which seeks to prevent, repress and punish trafficking in persons, in particular women and children;
 2. Calls on the Commission and the Council to work to secure the universal ratification of these instruments - and the implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child - in the context of their political dialogue with third countries, in particular the ACP countries under the Cotonou Agreement; calls for the situation of children to form an express part of the political agreement, in the same way as the development of democratic institutions, in all partnership agreements to be negotiated by the European Union;
 3. Calls on the Commission to draw up a strategy for combating poverty in order to combat trafficking in children;
 4. Emphasises that the fight against trafficking in children and the use of child soldiers must be a political priority for the European Union, a priority which must be reflected in budgetary decisions involving the allocation of sufficient resources to a specific heading to be created with a view to improving the effectiveness and raising the profile of Union action in this area, and in measures under the EDF, in particular its regional funding programmes;
 5. Calls on the Commission and the Council to implement their commitment to integrate children's rights into development cooperation instruments by adopting a twin-track approach involving both mainstreaming and measures which specifically target children's rights; to issue strategic implementation guidelines without delay; and to inform Parliament about the progress made in this area;
 6. Calls on the Commission to ensure that all EU legislation and policies are fully consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and urges that all relevant proposals for EU directives, policies and programmes should undergo a child impact analysis in order to assess their implications for children;
 7. Calls on the European Union and its Member States to tailor their development aid towards the provision of high-quality basic education accessible to all children free of charge; calls for a programme highlighting the risks of trafficking and violence against children to be organised in schools and local communities with the support of the European Union;
 8. Calls on the Commission and Council to implement a wide-ranging partnership with international and regional organisations, including the African Union, with a view to combating effectively trafficking in children, child slavery and the enrolment of children in fighting units;

9. Urges that, on the basis of this partnership, consideration should be given to establishing free population registers in all the countries concerned with a view to protecting children against the risk of being sold, trafficked or recruited by force onto the labour market or into the armed forces, facilitating their access to medical care, welfare services and schooling and fostering transparency and democracy, in particular when elections are called;
10. Welcomes the move made by the countries of West Africa to step up and coordinate their efforts under the 'Libreville Declaration' and urges them, in keeping with the spirit of that declaration, to implement close regional cooperation with a view to drawing up a regional agreement against trafficking which must incorporate a regional protocol providing for the return, repatriation and reintegration into society of children who have been victims of trafficking, on the basis of cooperation with the countries of 'origin', 'destination' and 'transit', local NGOs and multilateral organisations, such as UNICEF and the ILO;
11. Reiterates the importance it attaches to the EU paying closer attention to the issue of the education and schooling of children, the most effective means of combating trafficking in children and their enrolment in armed forces, and, with that aim in view, urges that greater attention should be paid to educational and training opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, i.e. young girls and orphans or children affected by Aids; calls for a specific chapter dealing with the situation of children to be included in agreements concluded with third countries on generalised systems of preference (GSP) so that an assessment can be made of whether those agreements are respected;
12. Calls on the Commission to draw up a common EU policy on trafficking in children, focusing on legal frameworks and the implementation of legislation, preventive measures, enforcement of criminal law and punishment of the perpetrators, as well as protection and support for the victims;
13. Calls on the Commission and the Council each to appoint a high-level representative for children's rights in order to ensure overall coordination, monitoring of results and a specific focus on children's rights, and to incorporate a stronger child dimension into all EU policy areas; suggests to the governments of African countries that they too might create such a high-level post;
14. Calls on the European Union and its Member States to take measures to protect the victims of trafficking, in particular by issuing short-stay visas, and to provide victims with all the assistance they require;
15. Calls on the Commission to consider the scope for simplifying the procedures by means of which local NGOs involved in development and the defence of human rights can apply for European subsidies within a framework of transparency and accountability;
16. Calls on the Commission and the Council to fully implement the 'Brussels Declaration on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings', approved by the Council on 8 May 2003, as part of their efforts to develop a comprehensive European policy on trafficking in human beings; welcomes the Commission's current moves to set up an EU Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings and urges that it should be focused and efficient in developing solutions to all aspects of this criminal activity;

17. Reiterates its call for international arrest warrants to be issued against the organisers of and participants in the networks specialising in child trafficking;
18. Calls for increased cooperation on the subject of trafficking in children between its own committees with a view to assessing all aspects of this phenomenon and putting forward practical recommendations as to how it can be combated effectively;
19. Calls on the Commission to draw up or support prevention programmes, involving, in particular, information campaigns aimed at community or religious leaders and all those working for and with children, and children themselves;
20. Calls on the Commission to support and promote activities and aid programmes developed and implemented by NGOs working with child soldiers to provide psychiatric and physical care and facilitate the social and educational reintegration of former child soldiers;
21. Calls on the Council to begin drafting forthwith the common strategy on children in armed conflicts, which was adopted in principle by the Council on 10 December 2002, and to consult it formally when preparing that joint strategy and to report to it regularly on the progress achieved;
22. Strongly condemns governments and armed opposition forces which continue to recruit child soldiers or which provide weapons and military aid to rebel movements that recruit child soldiers, in particular in the Great Lakes region, and calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to consider the recruitment and use of child soldiers as serious violations of the essential elements of the Cotonou Agreement;
23. Calls on the Commission delegations, as part of the decentralisation process, to devote a specific chapter to issues relating to children's rights in the strategy documents they draw up for each country;
24. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States and the various United Nations bodies concerned.