



Femmes Africa Solidarité

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INFORMATION NOTE

Paris Conference brings together NGOs and high level government representatives to discuss issue child soldiers

Last week 30 Non-Government Organisations met with the representatives of 58 countries, and 70 members of inter-government groups, to reaffirm the importance of confronting and resolving the issue of child soldiers and to define ways in which this commitment can be honoured. The event, held from the 5 – 6th February, was organised by the French government and UNICEF and was co-chaired by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Philippe Douste-Blazy, and the executive director of UNICEF, Ann Veneman .

In ten years the number of child soldiers deployed has remained at the same level of approximately 250,000. Of these one third are girls, whilst in some areas of conflict they comprise up to 40% of the children recruited. Since 2001 almost 95,000 former child soldiers have participated in management or reintegration programmes and yet UNICEF estimates that up to 90% of children involved in armed conflict can make progress in recovering physically and psychologically, if they are reintegrated into a protective environment, with access to schooling and other basic services.

Girls are especially vulnerable both during and after armed conflict. Many, who return from armed conflict, possibly with a child, are not portrayed as victims in the receiving communities; often they are ostracised and made to feel impure, whilst little is done to re-educate or re-train them.

In view of the need for gender sensitive and specific programs, which are appropriate for girls who have suffered sexual violence, the conference discussed how the reintegration of girls should be specifically adapted, with much greater emphasis placed on the communities which take in the demobilised girl soldiers. The conference therefore ratified the 'Paris Principles', which update and clarify the 'Cape Town Principles'. The Principles seek to encourage sustainable reintegration, by implementing programs which will foster a more protective environment and provide the children, particularly the girls, with real socio-economic opportunities, allowing them to generate their own income.

A political statement of intent to end the illegal use of children in conflict, and ensure the prosecution of the recruiters, was also signed by politicians at the conference. However, these 'Paris Commitments' are not legally binding and provide only a framework for action.

Certain areas of discussion were also avoided due to their sensitive nature, for example, although the fate of child soldiers from guerrilla armies was discussed in depth, little was said about their use in regular armies. Equally, in some Western countries, minors represent up to 30% of regular army intake.

Please Contact the FAS Office for more information



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