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Côte d'Ivoire: Let the children live in peace

In Cote d'Ivoire, children are recruited as child soldiers by armed units on both sides of the conflict. The recruitment and use of child soldiers violates children's rights and is a war crime.

Since the beginning of the armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire in September 2002, children are being recruited by both government armed forces and armed opposition groups. Forced to fight other people's wars, these child soldiers, many of them refugees from Liberia, are brutalized and traumatized by their experiences.

Shortly after the conflict started an Amnesty International delegation met child soldiers in the north of the country. They were under the command of the *Forces Nouvelles*, an armed opposition group. As recently as February 2005, two boys (aged ten and eleven) apparently of Liberian origin, were rescued by the UN forces in Côte d'Ivoire. In April 2005, the UN mission in Liberia arrested a man who is accused of recruiting child soldiers in Liberia for the Ivorian government's armed forces.

The government of Côte d'Ivoire and *Forces Nouvelles* have failed to genuinely engage with the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers. It is time for them to act to give the children a chance for peace.

Call to action

Write to Guillaume Soro, Secretary General of the *Forces Nouvelles*, and Laurent Gbagbo, President of Côte d'Ivoire, asking them to:

Sample letter

Dear Sir / Your Excellency

I ask you to urgently:

- Ensure that all armed forces immediately demobilize children under the age of 18 from their ranks and stop further recruitment of children (including re-recruitment of children who have been demobilized), as it is prescribed by national law;
- Immediately remove from positions of command and control any commanders suspected of recruiting and using child soldiers;
- Investigate independently, impartially and exhaustively the use and recruitment of child-soldiers in all parts of the country, ensuring that suspected perpetrators are brought to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards, without recourse to the death penalty;
- Genuinely engage in the demobilisation of child soldiers, facilitating their reintegration into society and providing adequately-resourced rehabilitation programmes which promote a return to civilian life and viable future for former child soldiers in civilian life;

(If you are sending your letter to Laurent Gbagbo, please add the following recommendation to your letter:)

-Ratify and rigorously implement both the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Target contact details

Guillaume Soro
Secretary General of the *Forces Nouvelles*
Bouaké
Côte d'Ivoire
Fax: + 225 31 63 22 84
Email: mopaci@hotmail.com

Salutation: Dear Sir

Target contact details

Laurent Gbagbo
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
01 BP 1354 Abidjan 01
Côte d'Ivoire
Tel/Fax: + 225 21 14 25 (to send a fax, please call the number first)

Salutation: Your Excellency

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Demobilized child soldiers.