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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Liberal International, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 February 2013]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Increased recruitment of children in armed conflicts around the world

Liberal International (LI) welcomes the Annual Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children to the twenty second session of the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council. LI firmly supports the conclusions of the report that no violence against children is justifiable and all violence can be prevented.

LI also welcomes the initiative by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict of launching the “Zero Under 18” campaign, aimed at achieving universal ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

This statement would like to pay particular attention to the increased levels of forced underage military recruitments around the world as LI considers this form of violence against children as one of the worst since it takes away their innocence, robs them from their childhood and tramples over their social growth and development. LI would like to focus on the following countries where children are at a particularly high risk of being recruited due to the volatile political and socio-economic situation:

Cambodia

Expresses concern that the demobilisation, rehabilitation, and re-integration of former child soldiers remains as a major issue in the country and emphasizes on the need for a transparent process in the distribution of funding related to donor-assisted programs earmarked for such purposes.

Emphasizes that the current aggressive rhetoric practiced by the government is counterproductive as it does not allow for a genuine democratic process and runs the risk of creating a socially volatile environment prone to armed conflicts and internal turmoil to which children are particularly vulnerable.

Calls on the government of Cambodia to unequivocally suspend all politically motivated charges against the leader of the opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party, Mr. Sam Rainsy, allowing him to return to the country and participate in the upcoming Parliamentary elections on behalf of his constituents.

Colombia

Notes with great concern the recent increase in the recruitment of child soldiers among the ranks of different guerrilla and paramilitary groups in the country with more than 18 000 children having been recruited just in the past 4 years representing an average age of 14 years old or younger.¹

Commends the on-going efforts of the ruling Partido de la U and President Santos in bringing about permanent peace, stability and security to the country by demanding for the disarmament of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia: the largest child soldiers recruitment rebel group in the country.

Calls on the government of Colombia to continue to work towards the elimination of the extreme poverty and illiteracy prevalent among the indigenous Colombian community as

¹ According to an official study called “Like Lambs Among Wolves” conducted by Natalia Springer, the Dean of the Law School at Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano in Bogota, Colombia.

children from such ethnic background run a particularly high risk of being recruited by rebel groups.

Cote d'Ivoire

Applauds the government of President Ouattara and the governing Rassemblement des Républicains Party for acceding to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Encourages President Ouattara to continue to work towards the elimination of the various security challenges in the country including the re-unification of the national army as to prevent forced military re-recruitment of children and provide the necessary conditions for full community reintegration of former child soldiers.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Welcomes the International Criminal Court's conviction of Thomas Lubanga who was found guilty for enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 as an important step to ending impunity in the country.

Notes with concern the Report of the UN Group of Experts on DRC published in November 2012 which highlights that the M23 armed group has recruited more than 250 children since its inception in May 2012.

Calls on the liberal forces in the country among which the ANADER, ARC and UREC parties to continue to work closely with the government as to end the impunity for crimes against children in armed conflicts and bring to justice all perpetrators responsible for the planning and execution of such acts.

Calls on the DRC to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Indonesia

Supports the strong democratic developments in Indonesia under the leadership of President Yudhoyono and Partai Demokrat.

Stands ready to work with the Yudhoyono government to intensify peace efforts in remaining conflict areas, particularly Aceh and West Papua, as resolution of these conflicts would significantly lessen the possibility of children being recruited for warfare.

Calls on President Yudhoyono to continue to work towards the full social reintegration and rehabilitation of former child soldiers in the country and develop a mechanism whereby legislation conflicting with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is overturned or revoked.

Mali

Notes with great concern the on-going crisis in the northern part of the country and its potential to destabilize the region.

Stresses that heavily armed children are fighting in the conflict with armed extremist groups paying around \$600 per child.²

Calls for an African-led solution to the crisis under the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States and its Chair President Ouattara.

² According to a fact-finding mission conducted in October 2012 by the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Mr. Ivan Simonovic.

Calls on the extremist armed groups occupying Northern Mali to immediately release all child soldiers.

Myanmar³

Welcomes the positive step taken by the government of Myanmar in June 2012 by signing the UN Action Plan aimed at ending the recruitment of child soldiers in the country.

Remains concerned that there is still no adequate follow-up and implementation of the action plan and there continues to be active military recruitment and training of minors.

Urges the government to continue to work with the National League for Democracy and its leader and LI Prize for Freedom Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi MP in order to continue to foster the democratization process in the country and achieve full national re-conciliation.

Calls on the government to pursue efforts to genuinely integrate into society minority ethnic groups such as the Shan, the Karen, the Karenni, the Chin, the Kachin, the Mon, the Arakan, the Rohingyas, among others.

Thailand

Notes with deep concern the increased number of child militia patrolling the Thai-Malaysian border.

Supports the liberal opposition in the country and in particular the Democrat Party in its mission to bring transparency and accountability to the political process in the country as a way of building a socially just society where the rights of minority groups, including those of children, are not exploited or abused.

Calls on the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict to undertake a monitoring mission to Thailand and work with the government and opposition as to identify any form of armed violence against children.

Appeals to the Thai government to seriously address Muslim insurgency in the southern part of the country: a conflict which serves as a fertile ground for the recruitment of child soldiers.

Philippines

Welcomes the affirmative measure taken by the government of President Aquino III and the ruling Liberal Party of the Philippines for the alignment of the Philippine law with international legal protections for children in armed conflict by initiating the draft bill on the Special Protection of Children in Situations of Armed Conflict.

Encourages the continuing discussions between the UN and the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process on the development of a strategy for engaging with government forces to protect children in armed conflict.

Commends President Aquino III for the peace agreement reached with the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front aimed at ending the strife in Mindanao as a positive step towards the elimination of armed conflicts in the country and the subsequent termination of child soldiers recruitment.

Takes note of the decision of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines to cooperate with the UN in order to identify and remove minors from the New People's Army.

³ Until 1989 referred to in the UN lexicon as Burma as it is still referred to within Liberal International.

Expresses deep concern that the Abu Sayyaf Group remains as the only separatist group which refuses to cooperate with the government and to release child soldiers.

Calls on the government of the Philippines to continue to monitor the agreements reached between the various rebel groups in the country and the UN in regards to the discontinuation of child recruitment practices as to assure their adequate implementation.

South Sudan

Welcomes the recent UN Action Plan signed by the Sudan People's Liberation Front aimed at releasing all remaining child soldiers and notes the existing cooperation between the separatist group and the country's Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission.

Notes with concern that around 2000 child combatants are yet to be released by the Sudan People's Liberation Army.⁴

Calls on US President Barack Obama to overturn a presidential memorandum signed in September 2012 which waves sanctions under the Child Soldiers Protection Act of 2008 for South Sudan.

Syrian Arab Republic

Expresses deep concern over the escalation of the humanitarian crisis and civil war conflict in the country.

Deplores the deliberate targeting of children by the armed forces of President Assad which now accounts for more than 3,000 casualties since the beginning of the unrest.

Notes with great concern the reports that the opposition forces in the country and in particular the Free Syrian Army are actively deploying children to the front lines of the armed conflict aimed at overthrowing the Assad's government.

Calls on President Assad to cease all killing and violence against his people and neighbouring countries, and to leave power with immediate effect.

Calls on the UN Security Council to take all necessary measures to stop the killings in Syria and supports the Arab League in implementing all necessary measures to put an end to the conflict in Syria.

Calls on the UN to attempt a political solution offering protection and participation of all Syrian groups in the future democratic political solution for Syria, based on full human rights and the rule of law.

Liberal International recalls

- Its resolution on child soldiers to its 58th Congress in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire which calls on governments and the international community to assure that children who have been recruited or used by armed forces or armed groups have the right and access to assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration.
- Its World Today resolution to its 56th Congress in Cairo, Egypt which addressed the gross human rights violations conducted against children during the decade-long civil conflict between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government.

⁴ According to a statement issued by the UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in March 2012.

- Its World Today resolution to its 55th Congress in Belfast, Northern Ireland which noted that the use of child soldiers demanded that all countries have to uphold the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child immediately and without delay.

Liberal International calls

- For the universal ratification and application of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict by all UN member states;
 - For the universal ratification and application of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child by the remaining seven member states of the African Union;
 - On the UN Commission for the Rights of the Child not to elect as members experts from states who do not comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in particular the Optional Protocol to the Convention;
 - On states which are major donors of international aid to re-evaluate the human rights clauses in their cooperation agreements and include sanctions for aid recipient countries where under-aged military recruitment is a prevalent practice;
 - On the international community and in particular undemocratic states like the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation to put an immediate halt to all military assistance and arms sales to countries where there are active recruitments of child soldiers;
 - For continuation of the UN "Zero under Eighteen" campaign;
 - For greater accountability for perpetrators of human rights violations against children in times of violence through strengthened national and international justice systems;
 - For the promotion of a culture of non-violence and equal access to education as a way of providing protection and sustainable development to children in countries at a particular risk of conflict.
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