NEW CHILD SOLDIERS BAN ADOPTED BY GENERAL ASSEMBLY

(New York, May 25, 2000) The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers welcomed today’s adoption by the UN General Assembly of a new treaty prohibiting the use of children under age eighteen in combat.*

Until now, children as young as age fifteen could be legally recruited and deployed into armed conflict," said Jo Becker, Steering Committee Chair for the Coalition. "The adoption of this new protocol by the General Assembly signals that it is no longer acceptable to use children in war."

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. It calls on governments to raise their minimum age for voluntary recruitment, but regrettably, still allows governmental armed forces to accept voluntary recruits from the age of sixteen, subject to certain safeguards.

The Coalition urged all governments to sign the new protocol at the upcoming Millennium Assembly of the UN General Assembly in September, and to ratify it as soon as possible. It also called on governments to adopt a minimum age of at least eighteen for voluntary recruitment, and to stipulate this age in binding declarations made at the time of ratification.

"We urge governments to demonstrate their commitment to ending the abuse of children as soldiers by ensuring that no child is recruited, immediately demobilizing any children already serving in their armed forces, and ensuring their re-integration into society," said Becker.

The Coalition estimates that 300,000 children under the age of eighteen are currently participating in armed conflicts in more than thirty countries around the world.

The Coalition formed in 1998 to seek to end the military recruitment and participation of all children under the age of eighteen years. Its Steering Committee members currently include Amnesty International, Defense for Children International, Human Rights Watch, the International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva, International Federation Terre des Hommes, World Vision International and regional organizations from Africa and Latin America. The Coalition also encompasses national coalitions in nearly forty countries worldwide.

Last week, the Coalition held the first-ever regional conference on the use of children as soldiers in Asia and the Pacific. Held in Kathmandu, Nepal from May 15-18, the conference drew government and civil society representatives from twenty countries in the Asia-Pacific region and Europe.