

# SAMPLE LETTERS

*The following sample letters are from Human Rights Watch and are designed to be used to urge signing or ratifying of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Rights of the Child that is aimed at ending the use of children as soldiers.*

## **General Letter for Governments That Have Not Signed the Optional Protocol**

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage your government to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict as part of its preparations for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002.

As you know, more than 300,000 children under 18 are today fighting as soldiers in armed conflicts in more than 30 countries worldwide with governmental armed forces and armed opposition groups alike. The UN Security Council, in Resolution 1261 of August 1999 and Resolution 1314 of August 2000, has called on the international community to give urgent attention to this problem.

The Optional Protocol prohibits governments and armed groups from using children under the age of 18 in hostilities; bans all compulsory recruitment under 18 and raises the minimum age for voluntary recruitment by governments from the current standard of 15 years; and bans all military recruitment and use of children under 18 by armed groups.

This new standard is a strong expression of the international consensus against the use of children as soldiers - to date, it has already been signed by 101 governments and ratified by 22 governments with the number steadily growing.

The Optional Protocol builds upon other international standards, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child which bans all forms of military recruitment under the age of 18, the International Labour Organisation's Convention 182 which prohibits forced recruitment of children under 18 for use in hostilities as one of the worst forms of child labour, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which defines the recruitment and use as soldiers of children under 15 as a war crime.

We hope that your government will be in the first rank of UN member states to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol and help to lay the foundation for a truly global ban on the use of children as soldiers. We urge you to sign and ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible, without reservations and setting at least 18 as the minimum age for all forms of military recruitment.

Yours sincerely

cc. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Geneva  
cc. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York

## **Sample Letter to Countries That Have Signed But Not Ratified**

I was very pleased that your government was among the first to sign the new Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. As you know, this new standard is a strong expression of the international consensus against the use of children as soldiers.

I am writing now to urge your government to ratify the Optional Protocol as part of its preparations for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children in 2002.

As of April 2002, 101 UN member states have signed the Optional Protocol. Twenty-two countries have now ratified, which will bring the protocol into force early in 2002. However, many more ratifications are needed in order to ensure global recognition and implementation of the protocol.

Your government has taken a strong stand on the child soldiers issue at the international level. Early ratification of the Optional Protocol in the lead up to the UNGA Special Session would underscore your government's commitment to these principles and help to lay the foundation for a truly global ban on the use of children as soldiers.

We urge you to ratify the Optional Protocol as soon as possible, without reservations and setting at least 18 as the minimum age for all forms of military recruitment.

Yours sincerely