

# FRANCE & AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

## The N'Djamena convention



On 9 June 2010, France, along with six African nations (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan) and the United States of America, signed the so-called N'Djamena convention, in which they pledged to “ensure non-involvement of children below 18 years in conflicts, directly or indirectly; end all forms of recruitment”, and establish a strategy to combat the proliferation and detention of light weapons by children.



### One of french diplomacy's major commitments

■ For many years, and especially since the January 2007 Paris Conference, France has been particularly involved in promoting and defending the rights of the child. The conference led to the adoption of the “Paris Principles” and “Paris Commitments” to protect children against forced recruitment or use by armed forces or armed groups during conflicts. These documents offer a framework for drafting and implementing new programmes for freeing, protecting, and reintegrating child soldiers (the **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process**, or **DDR**.) France plays an active role in the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, over which it presided until late 2008. With UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, France is organising a ministerial forum to monitor compliance with the Paris Commitments, in order to maintain and strengthen the political commitment of nations, and develop new programmes to protect the affected children in the field and allow and ease their reintegration.

■ The optional protocol (2000) to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) on the involvement of children in armed conflict came into force in 2002. It prohibits compulsory recruitment of children under 18 as well as their direct involvement in hostilities. July 2002 marked the coming into force of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court that made it a war crime to conscript or enlist children under the age of fifteen years in armed forces or groups, or use them in hostilities.

Hundreds of thousands of children are still enlisted in armed forces and groups around the world today, either as direct participants in acts of warfare, or indirect accessories through their work as cooks, porters, spies, deminers, or guards in oil or diamond mines. Minors are often employed in the sex trade. The recruitment and use of children in armed international and internal conflicts is a violation of their fundamental rights. It leads to physical, emotional, and psychological damage that, in the medium and long term, hinders their development and affects their role in society.

### The Paris Principles (Paris, February 2007)

These “Commitments” were adopted in Paris in February 2007, and express the determination of UN Member States to stamp out the recruitment and use of child soldiers by armed forces and groups. These commitments seek to:

- protect the children in question
- put forward clear resolutions and directives to fight the culture of impunity
- identify priorities in order to provide effective assistance to children and prevent all forms of discrimination, violence, or recruitment.

### Child soldiers are victims

The situation of child soldiers continues to remain problematic, not only during their direct or indirect participation in hostilities, but also when hostilities have ceased or when they are captured during conflict. In some contexts, child soldiers who are arrested and/or held in detention are subjected to physical or moral violence (cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, detention with adults, interference with minimum procedural safeguards, lack of protection of children's identities, imposition of death penalty).



### Childhood Without Bars project

The "Childhood Without Bars" project of the International Catholic Child Bureau (€142,500) seeks to bring about a radical change in juvenile court systems and practices in five Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru) to bring them in line with key international and national legal instruments.

### Agir pour les femmes project

The aim of the Agir pour les femmes en situation précaire programme (505,400€) is to support children and women who are victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, as well as to reinforce institutional capacities in Lao PDR.

### Children in Armed Conflict

Since 2008, France has been at the helm of a **multi-year cooperation project** (FSP, €2 millions, 2008-2011) aimed at improving the protection of children during armed conflict in the African Great Lakes region as well as Central and East Africa. In these two regions, interventions are based on three components:

- protection and assistance aimed at facilitating the long-term reinsertion of child victims
- prevention and awareness building of children's rights to combat the use of children in armed conflict
- reinforcement of the capacity of communities and authorities to assist child victims of armed conflict.

### Legal instruments governing the rights of the child

By virtue of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, children are protected from all forms of abuse such as murder, torture, other forms of mistreatment, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, illegal recruitment, hostage-taking and forced displacement.

- Geneva Conventions (1949) + additional Protocols (1977)
- International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- EU Guidelines on the Rights of the Child (2003, amended in 2008)
- African Charter on the Rights And Welfare of the Child (July 1990)

### Cooperation activities

■ French diplomacy has made children's rights one of the priorities of cooperation. Its cooperation activities seek to **establish regular, constant, and constructive dialogue with States and civil society**. The celebration of **Universal Children's Day (20 November)** is one of the highlights in France and its diplomatic missions, and features cultural events, round-table discussions, and more. This policy, based upon the **Strategy of democratic governance (adopted in December 2006)**, takes form in the **reinforcement of the capabilities of those involved** and the ownership of themes by giving them an active role (especially women) in defining, implementing, and assessing public policies.

■ French cooperation also has several **tools** at its disposal for implementing its cooperation activities: **Priority Solidarity Fund (FSP)** projects, **financial contributions** to international organisations, aid to French and foreign NGOs working on priority themes, grants for

human rights activists, support for women's rights-themed projects presented for **EU funding** (European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, EIDHR), international visitor leadership programme.

■ Cooperation programmes in the area of child protection, particularly those involving children in armed forces or groups, are carried out in conjunction with intergovernmental institutions (both French and international, e.g. UNICEF) and NGOs.

■ Consequently, and in tandem with the FSP project for children and armed conflict, the French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (MAEE) provided funding of €700,000 in 2008 to a project with UNICEF and the Democratic Republic of the Congo called "Supporting activities for the prevention of child recruitment and the reinsertion of children affected by armed conflict in the DRC".

### USEFUL LINKS

- **United Nations website** on the status of ratifications and reservations on the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict  
[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)
- **Website of the MAEE**  
[www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france/830/droits-homme\\_1048/droits-enfant\\_4669/index.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france/830/droits-homme_1048/droits-enfant_4669/index.html)

- **Website of the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York**  
[www.franceonu.org/spip.php?article3841](http://www.franceonu.org/spip.php?article3841)
- **Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers**  
[www.child-soldiers.org](http://www.child-soldiers.org)