

'It is immoral that adults should want children to fight their wars. There is simply no excuse for arming children.' Archbishop Desmond Tutu

One of most distressing aspects of modern day warfare is the extensive use of child soldiers. In war torn countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Angola to mention but a few, the use of child soldiers is common. Use of child soldiers also covers issues such as child labour, exploitation and results in the oppression of a child's rights. An estimated 300,000 child soldiers - boys and girls under the age of 18 - are involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide. Child soldiers are used as combatants, messengers, porters, cooks and to provide sexual services. A factor which also needs to be recognised is that children may 'choose' to be soldiers as they see it as a way out of the extreme poverty they are living in. To this extent, not only does this distressing issue need to be tackled from the aspect of forced child soldiers but also that of demeaning living conditions and world poverty.

What can you do to help change this situation?

In 2000, a **dramatic breakthrough was achieved in efforts to end the use of children as soldiers.** On January 21, after six years of negotiations, governments from around the world agreed on a new international treaty to prohibit the use of children as combatants.

The [child soldiers protocol](#) establishes eighteen as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for compulsory recruitment, and for any recruitment or use in hostilities by non-governmental armed groups. It is an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict.

But not every country in the world has ratified the optional protocol (made the treaty valid by confirming it) – let alone made sure it is implemented correctly. [Find out which countries have, and which countries haven't ratified this treaty, and join the Human Right's Watch campaign to make sure the protocol takes effect!](#)

Take another step further towards the implementation of the Optional Protocol!

Published by the

[Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers](#)

and

UNICEF

, the

'Guide to the Optional Protocol'

is an essential guide for child rights advocates looking for help in generating momentum and support in the implementation of the Protocol.

Visit the website of [Human Rights Watch](#) to find out more about child soldiers.

For a detailed account of the [Use of Child Soldiers in Africa, with facts and figures click here.](#)

Click here for a [Special report on child soldiers from the UN office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.](#)

For more information on child soldiers please see the [Child Rights Information Network.](#)