

ENDING THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS: HISTORY, IMPACT AND EVOLUTION

HEARING

BEFORE THE

TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

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ENDING THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS: HISTORY, IMPACT AND EVOLUTION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2014

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
TOM LANTOS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
Washington, D.C.

The Commission met, pursuant to call, at 2:00 p.m., in Room 2360, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James P. McGovern [cochairman of the Commission] presiding.

Present: Representative McGovern.

Staff Present: Andrew Longhi, Democratic Fellow; Dan Hall, Democratic Fellow.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much for being here. Good morning I am sorry, no, we are not, we are in the afternoon and welcome to the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission's hearing on "Ending the Use of Child Soldiers: History, Impact and Evolution."

I would like to welcome all of our witnesses today. I want to thank you for your advocacy on behalf of child soldiers and for your tireless efforts to highlight their situation. I also want to thank the staff of the Commission for organizing this important hearing.

I should apologize to you up front that there may be others that may not be because last night, unexpectedly, they decided to adjourn the session until after the election, which was quite a surprise. But this is an important hearing, and I think it is important that we have it, and so I especially appreciate that you are here. The recruitment and use of minors, of children as soldiers is prohibited under international human rights, labor, and criminal laws, yet there continue to be far too many instances in which both government and nonstate fighting forces rely on child soldiers to carry out their missions. The proliferation of various nonstate armed actors, such as organized crime, paramilitary groups, insurgent groups, and ethnic or sectarian militias, has deeply exacerbated the problem, especially in regional conflicts where the use of children in conflicts has contributed to blurring the lines between civilian and combatant populations.

Armed actors find the use of children attractive because they are seen as easily manipulated, cheap, and expendable. The toll on these vulnerable children is serious and enduring. Children associated with parties to conflict often face long term physical and

psychological trauma. Among the many challenges facing international, regional, and local communities in combatting the use of child soldiers is the aftermath, identifying and rehabilitating former child soldiers in an environment of strained resources and low awareness of their need for care.

Recent debate at the international level, including actions taken by the United States, make this an opportune time to highlight the challenge of child soldiers and to elevate the discussion. In May the U.N. Secretary General issued his annual report on children and armed conflict to the United Nations Security Council, a report which attempts to capture the global scale of this crisis.

The U.S. Department of Treasury identifies and targets individuals connected with the recruitment and use of child soldiers by freezing and blocking their assets and prohibiting all U.S. persons from engaging in financial or commercial transactions with such individuals. The U.S. Department of Labor also incorporates findings related to the exploitation of children as child soldiers in its annual report on the worst forms of child labor.

More recently the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008 mandates that the Secretary of State publish a list of states that have governmental armed forces or government supported armed groups, including paramilitaries, militias, or civil defense forces, that recruit and use child soldiers. The act prohibits the issuance of licenses for commercial sale of military equipment and provision of security assistance to the listed countries. However, President Obama issued national security waivers for 5 out of the 10 countries listed on the 2013 CSPA list last year, potentially authorizing the sale of military technology and training to countries currently using child soldiers in armed conflict.

Given the continued scale of the use of child soldiers, we clearly have a long way to go in our fight to end the practice. In Colombia and Central America I have personally seen the impact on children who were forcibly recruited or voluntarily joined armed groups. In the latter case, many of these children had few or no alternatives in their own communities. Their families often couldn't afford clothing or food for the children and would often surrender them to guerrilla or paramilitary groups because those groups promised to feed them.

Others were escaping violent or abusive family situations or neighborhoods. Others were seduced by the power and perceived glamour of an adult soldier looking for young recruits. But all were exploited and too young to know the consequences of the choice that they were making. In addition, from Sierra Leone to the LRA, I have met many young men and women who were forcibly recruited by violent armed actors and whose emotional and psychological suffering continues years after they escaped or were demobilized.

I also think a great deal about the young men and women I met in Colombia and El Salvador who were forced to join violent criminal organizations or gangs because

refusal was not an option. Those who do not join the gangs must either flee their communities or face certain death not just for them, but for every member of their family potentially. I have been inspired by their courage, by the many community based NGOs who work to empower and protect these young people, and by the programs they offer to create safe spaces and alternatives to a world dominated by gang life.

I just should say by way of an aside, I went down to the border, the Mexico Texas border, after we had adjourned in July to visit some of these children who were coming to our border, and many of their stories were about them escaping the violence of gangs and other criminal armed groups in their home countries.

I look forward to hearing today about lessons learned from ongoing efforts to curb the use of child soldiers and what more can be done to stop violations from happening. It is also my hope that our witnesses will help to identify gaps in our foreign policy to ensure that the United States is a leader in ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. With honest reflection on the scope of the problem at hand and an understanding of concrete ways to improve our engagement, today's discussion can put us on a path to making sure children no longer face firsthand the horrors of war.

With that, I turn the testimony over now to the witnesses, and I would like to formally submit the written testimonies of all the witnesses, as well as reports provided by their supporting organizations, into the hearing record.

So I would like to first of all welcome Leila Zerrougui, who is a Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict in the United Nations.

I admire your work and your passion on this issue. And I would like to now turn this over to you for your testimony, and we look forward to hearing it. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF LEILA ZERROUGUI, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
SECRETARY GENERAL FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT, UNITED
NATIONS

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Thank you very much. Thank you for the invitation. Thank you for making this possible. I would like to, ladies and gentlemen, Congressman McGovern, let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation to you and both the cochairs of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for their interest in the issue of child recruitment and use and you for making this hearing possible.

I would like to thank the government of the United States for its continued support to my mandate. Your country continues to be a strong ally in our efforts to protect children from conflict. Earlier this month Samantha Power, your Ambassador at the United Nations, demonstrated once again her commitment to children by hosting the presentation of the annual report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict in an open debate in the Security Council.

I think that you already mentioned the consequences of war on children, and from my own experience what I can say is that war destroys the lives of millions of children and their families around the globe. The children I met in conflict zones have one thing in common: They spend years, if not their entire lives, recovering from the trauma of war. Their wounds are physical, psychological, emotional, and social.

My mandate was created by the General Assembly following the publication in 1996 of the report by Graca Machel on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. Her report provided the world with a comprehensive picture of child soldiers, highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children, and identified them as primary victims of armed conflict.

Since 1999 the systematic engagement of the Security Council has placed the protection of children affected by armed conflict at the heart of its international peace and security agenda. The Security Council has given us strong framework, but also tools to address the issue of violations against children.

First, the Council identified the six grave violations affecting children in time of conflict. These are recruitment and use of children, maiming and killing of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction of children, and denial of humanitarian access to children in conflict.

The Council then adopted resolutions. These resolutions, first of all, are request the U.N. to gather and verify information detailing where and how children are affected by armed conflict and to use this information to prepare the annual report of the secretary general to the Security Council.

Second, request the U.N. to name parties to conflict who recruit and use children, kill and maim children, commit rape and sexual violence, and also attack schools and hospitals.

The Security Council also requests the U.N. to engage in dialogue with governments and armed groups to develop action plans with state and nonstate parties to conflict to halt and prevent violations against children.

Action plans are designated to end violations against children, release and reunify children with their families, but also to put in place mechanisms to prevent future recruitment and use of children or other grave violations and to promote accountability. Currently on my agenda I have 23 situations of conflict, 59 parties to conflict listed. Eight of them are government forces and 51 are nonstate actors.

To implement the mandate, my office, with the United Nations system, civil society partners, regional and subregional organizations, with active support of several countries, will try to achieve some results.

Unfortunately, we are now facing so many crises. Out of the 23 conflict situations on my mandate, we have at least six major crises. In the Middle East, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, but also in Gaza have a devastating impact on children. I am also preoccupied by the situation in Yemen and in Libya, as you know.

In Africa, children are hugely affected by conflict in South Sudan, Central African Republic, but also presently in Nigeria. There are also serious concerns for the protection of children in protracted conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo. And even in Mali, despite improvements, the situation still remains volatile. In all of these conflicts children are paying a very high price. They are recruited by government forces and nonstate armed groups, killed or maimed as combatants or caught in the crossfire, abducted from their homes, and subjected to sexual violence. Their schools and hospitals are under attack, and they are too often deprived of humanitarian access. I can address each of the conflict situations on my agenda in the Q&A portion of this hearing.

But I would like also to give some hope and talk about progress that we are trying to achieve. Six months ago, in collaboration with UNICEF, we launched what is now known as the global campaign called Children, not Soldiers. The campaign aims at galvanizing support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by national security forces in situations of conflict by the end of 2016.

At the time of the launch, eight national forces were listed for the recruitment and use of children in the annual report of the Secretary General on children and armed conflict. They are Afghanistan, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. Seven of these countries have signed an action plan with the United Nations. The action plans identify necessary steps they need to make their security forces child free. Key activities include the criminalization of recruitment

of children, the age verification of soldiers, and the release of children and reintegration. The age verification is important because in many of these settings you don't have a birth registration, so you need to know the age.

I am committed, along with United Nations agencies such as UNICEF, but also other partners, to provide support to enable the implementation of the action plans. And there is progress to report. With the full support of the United Nations, for instance, Chad after 1 year completed all the requirements under its action plan and its national army was delisted from the Secretary General's list of those who recruit child soldiers. The government of Afghanistan endorsed a road map recently to accelerate the implementation of its action plan. Myanmar will be moving forward on its action plan and is scheduled to release additional children in the coming days. Somalia has put in place mechanisms for the handover to the United Nations of children found in the ranks of its army and established a child protection unit in the Somali armed forces. In DRC also we have progress, so if there is any question I can mention.

While the progress I highlighted is encouraging, there is still a lot of work to do to achieve our objective. Support by both financial and technical is essential. We also need to be prepared to address setbacks. In South Sudan, for instance, most of the progress accomplished to address the issue of child soldiers with the SPLA has been erased, and despite the government and opposition's recommitment to end the recruitment of children, we continue to receive troubling reports of child soldiers recruited throughout the country since the last crisis, and I saw some of them myself during a visit to the country last June.

But as I mentioned earlier, the vast majority of parties listed in the Secretary General's annual report are nonstate actors. To date we have concluded an equal number of action plans with nonstate and state actors. These nonstate actors continue also to approach my office and our partners on the ground to conclude commitments to end child recruitment and other violations against children. A recent example is the commitment received by my office from the Syrian National Coalition, and I am hopeful that we can conclude our action plan with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines soonest.

Let me come to your support and the support of the United States to our work. And you mentioned the Child Soldiers Prevention and Accountability Act. The U.S. Child Soldiers Prevention and Accountability Acts are of great importance, and we consider them as a model on how accountability for violations against children can lead to genuine positive change for children. Though an action plan is a contract between a listed armed party and the United Nations, the concerted pressure exercised by states upon those parties is of immense value in our advocacy to both bring them to the table and to see appropriate action taken.

The United States has done this both through listing parties in its CSPA mandated reporting and in the advocacy undertaken and support given to concerned states to come

into compliance, and you mentioned that. I would hope to see similar results under the Child Soldier Accountability Act.

Congressman McGovern, ladies and gentlemen, in this time of upheaval when the world is focused on the repugnant acts of groups who use and sow terror, it is imperative that we pause to consider what will happen to innocent children if we do not take specific action to protect families who are in areas under control of these groups or children who have been associated with these groups.

What are we expecting from the U.S.? I think that the United States can do a lot. It is a major player. And we think that to help us better protect children from conflict and also to reach the objective of the campaign, I would like to invite you and your colleagues in the Commission and in the Congress to maintain your government's engagement and to help us in some specific actions that I would like to mention. Support for the Children, not Soldier campaign. Support for the separation of children from state and nonstate actors through advocacy, financial and technical resources to concerned governments, and implementing partners in the field. Provide reintegration assistance to former child soldiers through education, training, and youth employment, as well as psycho social assistance. Provide expertise and support for security and judicial sector reforms with a focus on building national institutions to promote accountability. Continue to support mainstreaming of child protection in regional organizations, such as NATO, and ensure the U.S. support attaches minimum criteria for the protection of children in peacekeeping operations.

Where the U.S. can directly support action plans, such as in Afghanistan, engage with the U.N. and the government in support of the action plan process. When possible, pressure nonstate actors to end grave violations against children.

In the multiple crises we face today, we often forget that children are the majority of the population and they are the future generation. They cannot wait any longer for the protection we have promised. So thank you again for this opportunity.

[The statement of Ms. Zerrougui follows:]

Prepared Statement of Leila Zerrougui

Members of Congress, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me first express my sincere appreciation to the co-chairs and members of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for their interest in the issue of child recruitment and use and for making this hearing possible.

I would like to thank the Government of the United States for its continued support to my mandate. Your country continues to be a strong ally in our efforts to protect children from conflict. Earlier this month, Samantha Power, your ambassador at the United Nations, demonstrated once again her commitment to children by hosting the presentation of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in an open debate at the Security Council.

Congressman McGovern, Congressman Wolf, Members of the Commission,

War destroys the lives of millions of children and their families around the globe. The children I meet in conflict zones have one thing in common: they spend years, if not their entire lives, recovering from the trauma of war. Their wounds are physical, psychological, emotional and social.

The Mandate

My mandate was created by the General Assembly following the publication, in 1996, of the report by Graca Machel on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children. Her report provided the world with a comprehensive picture of child soldiers, highlighted the disproportionate impact of war on children and identified them as the primary victims of armed conflict.

Since 1999, the systematic engagement of the Security Council has placed the protection of children affected by armed conflict at the heart of its international **peace and security agenda**.

The Security Council has given us a strong framework to address violations against children.

First, the council defined the six grave violations affecting children in times of conflict:

- recruitment and use of children,
- killing and maiming of children,
- sexual violence against children,
- attacks on schools and hospitals,
- abduction of children and
- denial of humanitarian access.

Then, the Council adopted resolutions to:

- Request the UN to gather and verify information detailing where and how children are affected by armed conflict, and to use this information to prepare an annual report for the Security Council;
- Request the UN to **name** parties to conflict who: recruit and use children, kill and maim children, commit rape and sexual violence on children and attack schools and hospitals;
- Request the UN to engage in dialogue with Governments and armed groups to develop Action Plans with state and not-state parties to conflict to halt and prevent violations against children.

Action plans are designed to end violations against children, release and reunify children with their families, but also to put in place mechanisms to prevent future recruitment and use of children or other grave violations and to promote accountability.

Currently, on my agenda, there are **23 conflict situations**

59 Parties are listed

8 Government security forces

51 Non-state actors

To implement the mandate, my office works with the UN system, civil society partners, regional and sub-regional organizations, with the active support of several countries.

Current crises:

Of the 23 conflict situations on my agenda, at least 6 are major crises.

In the Middle East, the conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Gaza have a devastating impact on children. I am also preoccupied by the situation in Libya and Yemen.

In Africa, children are hugely affected by conflict in South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Nigeria.

There are also serious concerns for the protection of children in protracted conflicts in Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite improvements, the situation in Mali remains volatile

In all of these conflicts, children are paying a very high price. They are recruited by Government forces and non-State armed groups, killed or maimed as combatants or caught in the crossfire, abducted from their homes, and subjected to sexual violence. Their schools and hospitals are under attack and they are too often deprived of humanitarian assistance.

I can address each of the conflict situations on my agenda in greater detail during the Q&A portion of this hearing.

But for now, let's turn to areas of progress:

Children, Not Soldiers

Six months ago, in collaboration with UNICEF, I launched a global campaign called 'Children, not Soldiers'.

The Campaign aims at galvanizing support to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by **national security forces** in situations of conflict by the end of 2016. Listed forces include: Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Yemen. **Seven** of these countries have committed to make their security forces child-free by signing Action Plans with the United Nations. The action plans identify necessary steps they need to take to make their security forces child free. Key activities include the criminalization of recruitment of children; the age verification of soldiers and their release and the assistance for the reintegration of children released.

I am committed, along with UN agencies such as UNICEF and other partners, to provide support to enable the implementation of the Action Plans.

And there is progress to report:

- With the full support of the United Nations, Chad completed all the requirements under its action plan and its national army was delisted from the Secretary-General's list of those who recruit child soldiers.
- The government of Afghanistan endorsed a road map to accelerate the implementation of its action plan. Myanmar will be moving forward on its action plan and is scheduled to release additional children in the coming days.
- Somalia has put in place mechanisms for the handover to the United Nations of children found in the ranks of its army and established a child protection unit in the Somali armed forces.

But progress in some situations hit setbacks. In South Sudan, most of the progress accomplished to address the issue of child soldiers within the SPLA has been erased and, despite the Government and Opposition's re-commitment to end the recruitment of children, we continue to receive troubling reports of child soldiers recruited throughout the country. I saw some of them myself during a visit to the country in June.

Non-State Actors

As I mentioned earlier, the vast majority of parties listed in the Secretary-General's annual report are non-state actors. To date we have concluded an equal number of action plans with non-state as state actors. These non-state actors continue to approach my Office and our partners on the ground to conclude commitments to end child recruitment and other violations against children. A recent example is the commitment received by my Office by the Syrian National Coalition, and I am hopeful that we can conclude our action plan with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines soonest.

Child Soldier Prevention and Accountability Acts

The U.S. Child Soldier Prevention and Accountability Acts are of great importance and are a model in some ways on how accountability for violations against children can lead to genuine positive change for

children. Though an action plan is a contract between a listed armed party and the United Nations, the concerted pressure exercised by states upon those parties is of immense value in our advocacy to both bring them to the table and to see appropriate actions taken. The United States has done this both through listing parties in its CSPA mandated reporting and in the advocacy undertaken and support given to concerned states to come into compliance. I would hope to see similar results under the Child Soldier Accountability Act.

Congressman McGovern, Congressman Wolf, Members of the Commission,

In this time of upheaval when the world is focussed on the repugnant acts of groups who use and sow terror, it is imperative that we pause to consider what is and will happen to innocent children if we do not take specific action to protect those who are in areas under control of these groups or children who have been associated with these groups.

Role of the US

To help us better protect children from conflict – and also to reach the objective of the campaign, I would like to invite you, as members of the United States Congress to maintain your Government's engagement and to assist us by helping us to ensure:

1. Support for the 2016 Campaign and the separation of children from state and non-state actors through advocacy, financial and technical resources to concerned Governments and implementing partners in the field;
2. Expertise and support for security sector reforms and judicial reforms, with a focus on building national institutions to promote accountability;
3. Reintegration assistance to former child soldiers through education, training and youth employment, as well as psycho-social assistance;
4. Continue to support mainstreaming of child protection in regional organizations such as NATO, and ensure the US support attaches minimum criteria for protecting children in peacekeeping operations;
5. Where the US can directly support action plans, such as in Afghanistan, engage with the UN and the Government in support of the action plan process;
6. When possible, pressure non-state actors to end grave violations against children.

In the multiple crises we face today, we often forget that children are the majority of the population. They cannot wait any longer for the protection we have promised.

I thank you again and look forward to your questions.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you, Ms. Zerrougui, for your testimony.

And I appreciate again all the work that you are doing and what the United Nations is doing.

You mentioned some of the things that you want the U.S. to be helpful with. I think if I talk to some of our officials they would tell you that they support reintegration, they support all this stuff.

I guess what I would like to get more specifics about is what more can the United States do? I mean, even though this is technically not a legislative committee, a lot of the legislation that those on the committee introduce is as a result of hearings like this. It would be helpful to know specifically, even in terms of dollar amounts, and I don't expect you to give that to me today, but how we can help more and be more effective in supporting your mandate.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Thank you very much. I think that we have, for example, if you talk about the campaign, we have seven countries that are concerned. At least those who signed an actual plan, we have six remaining. If we see these six, the majority of them the relationship between the United States and these governments is very strong. South Sudan, Yemen, DR Congo, Somalia, Afghanistan, Myanmar, these are countries that the government of the United States have leverage.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. And I would say some action plans were signed thanks to the support. When, for example, I was in DR Congo, and I know that the signing of the action plan in 2012 was also because the threat of to stop the assistance provided to the FRDC, the minister of defense and the military.

So I think this is an area where government of the United States has influence, has programs, and has persons that can have use their leverage to help us move forward on certain issues that are not considered as a priority for the governments concerned. And we saw it, for example, in Somalia, to push, to put in place. We had this action plan signed in 2012, but the tools were put in place just this year, and we used the leverage of our government partners, including U.K. and U.S., to move forward. So this is something that I think can help.

Second, you have programs, and you have, for example, USAID working in countries that are concerned by this issue. They are listed or they have an action plan. I tried, for example, when I was in DRC, promoting accountability to have programs that are directed to the judiciary, to identify programs that allow the judiciary to get support if they advance the fight against impunity, if they arrest not the foot soldiers but the chain of command, the high ranking that are involved in violations.

I think this is very important because unless we ensure that the response is coming from inside the country and the institutions are responding, changing legislation, helping implementation, it will not be sustainable. I know in some countries we have programs that we would like to fund, and we would like to see this program funded.

And another issue also I think a lot of support we can get is through the SSR, security sector reform. If we have in the training, and I tried advocate on this, to ensure that in the training provided to troops to include mainstream child protection, this is important, to ensure that those who are trained understand that in the armed group they are fighting, children are on the other side. So how to hand them over, how to deal with them?

And lastly I think that also with nonstate actors. Yesterday I think a vote was adopted to support the Free Syrian Army, for example. They have children on there, they are listed for child recruitment. So you will have leverage to ensure they approached us to sign an action plan that will be an opportunity to ensure that they release children from their ranks and they implement their commitment that they already announced to the Security Council and to my office.

Mr. McGOVERN. No, I appreciate that. And maybe what we should do, I should do, is invite you and your staff to be in touch with us. As time goes on, if it looks like there is one country in particular that seems to be backtracking, then maybe that may be a reason for us to pressure our administration, but also to let the government that is not living up to its promise know that we are paying attention. That may be helpful. The other thing on this Children, not Soldiers campaign, maybe there are things that we can do here on the Hill among some of our colleagues to promote the campaign and to raise awareness. I mean, we all have Web pages. At some point we will actually be in session again, whenever that may be I don't know, but there may be an opportunity at that time to maybe kind of do a briefing or whatever so that people know what the campaign is, know how they could be helpful, and not just in terms of raising awareness, but specific action items that people can be involved with, with their constituencies, to try to deal with this issue.

So that is kind of a long way of saying that, look, I think in a very bipartisan way, people are very concerned about this, but we are concerned about a lot of things and sometimes things we are concerned about, they don't make it up to the top of the list in terms of priorities all the time. But I think there are a lot of people on this Commission that really would like to work with you on that.

You mentioned the nonstate actors that constitute the majority of parties listed by the Secretary General for grave violations against children. What is your strategy to engage them and how do you approach nonstate actors and are they receptive to the action plan process?

Ms. ZERROUGUI. I think that when we talk about 51 nonstate actors, that means it is a huge group, they are not one group. We try to approach them by first of all dividing them in subgroups who are interested in really engaging with the U.N. because they need legitimacy, they need to be accepted by the international community, they have a political agenda, like the FSA, like other armed groups that would like to have. These are easier to approach because we can ourselves approach them, we can approach them through those who have an influence on them, we can approach them through partners on the ground. So these are the ones with whom we engage. We have signed, for example, we signed an action plan in the past and now we have an action plan that we are trying to finalize with the MILF in Philippines. We are working, as I said, with the FSA. We are trying to engage with the MNLA in northern Mali, we are working also to engage with them. Because you have a political process, you have armed groups that are recognized by either part of the international community or even by their own government, and there is an opportunity to work with them.

And then you have others that it is very difficult, either because their chain of command is very loose, like the Mai Mai in the Congo, or in other places, like the anti Balaka in Central African Republic. It is very difficult to find how to follow up, sign an action plan. It is not maybe the best option. So we try to put more pressure and use those who can put the pressure through justice, through military operations to reduce their influence and release children.

Then you have others, like those ISIL, Al Qaeda, and this is another category that is not with children. But we try also to use justice inside a country, international justice, Sanctions Committee. Yesterday I briefed the Sanctions Committee on DRC. I did before on Central African Republic. We try to use all the tools that the Security Council has and also engage with member states that have an influence by, for example, what I am trying to tell you with regard to the FSA, for example.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. I do the same with other countries if I know that they have an influence on another group to say do something to stop.

Mr. McGOVERN. Just on that, let me be specific here. Right now the Colombian government and FARC guerrillas are in peace negotiations looking at issues related to victims, including child soldiers and recruitment of minors. Have the negotiators reached out to you for your expertise? And if not, is that something that your office might be open to?

Ms. ZERROUGUI. We are very low profile, but we are in contact with the government of Colombia, but also with the mediator who is trying to bring the two parties together. I also met with the adviser to the President on victims rights. So we try to work discreetly because we don't want to intervene in the process that is still ongoing, but we insisted very much with all the parties that have an influence and with the government of Colombia that it is in their interest, it is in the interest of everyone. And

the experience, and you mentioned it yourself, if we don't address properly the release and reintegration of child soldiers in the peace process, they will end in criminal gangs. The experience in Latin America is very clear.

Mr. McGOVERN. Absolutely, yes.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. And I think I have convinced even our colleagues inside the government that this is important for them to ensure that those who were in armed groups used to use, I mean, they had a very prominent position in an armed group, they will be the first to be recruited by gangs. So it is important to ensure that they are properly identified, programs are there to reintegrate them, help them to have their way out and become good citizens for the future of Colombia.

So we are trying. We don't have much space. I know maybe the United States has more opportunity to work on that, and we are very happy to support without taking any credit. We just would like to make sure that children are dealt with properly and they are not forgotten.

We are trying to push this issue in every space practically in peace agreements. I pushed very hard IGAD. I am very happy to see that, for example, in the peace agreement on Central African Republic the issue of release of children is mentioned in the Brazzaville agreement. We are also trying to reach to Algiers to make sure that in Mali it will not be forgotten.

So trying to do that everywhere, and if you can help, I would be very happy.

Mr. McGOVERN. I have spent a considerable amount of time in Colombia

Ms. ZERROUGUI. So please.

Mr. McGOVERN. and have watched that war just devastate just generation after generation after generation. And sometimes what worries me, and I am thinking of El Salvador when I thinking of this right now, is that you have got the political players on all sides that are anxious to reach a settlement, and their idea of a settlement is a signed piece of paper that maybe takes care of kind of the major actors on all the sides but doesn't deal with some of the detail. And as a result, when there is not a reintegration program and there is no place for these young kids to go, they end up in criminal gangs, they end up in a life of despair and hopelessness, which is obviously heartbreaking for them, but very bad for the country, and you don't ever really achieve the peace that you want.

And in Colombia you have had the guerrillas that have used child soldiers, you have had members of the militia, you have had even members of the security forces take advantage of young children, and they are really the victims in this. And so I hope as these negotiations go forward, and it sounds like you are already plugged in, so I feel somewhat relieved that this is an issue that people are thinking about and you are talking

to them about. A peace agreement should be something that is lasting, not just something that looks good for a week and then we go back to business as usual. And if there are ways that we can help on that as well, we are anxious to be supportive. We were talking about Syria before, and you said the opposition groups, the so called moderate opposition groups have agreed to not recruit children?

Ms. ZERROUGUI. My first visit to Syria was in November 2012. At the time already the first thing I did when I arrived there is to have a contact with commanders on the ground from the opposition. And I spoke with at least at the time through the office of Mr. Brahimi to be in touch with at least the commander in Homs and someone in Damascus, and I asked them at the time to release children. We started pushing since that time trying to make sure that they address this issue.

I think it was difficult for them, for the opposition outside, the representative of the FSA outside, within all what is happening in Syria to take a very strong position with regard to the way things are going on the ground on this issue. Children were recruited. I met so many when I was there. And so there is no doubt about the fact that children in all armed groups are recruited. That is why we listed them. We listed the FSA affiliated group, but we listed also Ansar, al Nusra, ISIL, and also Ahrar al Sham. They are all listed on our annex, the annex of the Secretary General.

But we saw movement in the recent time. First of all, they reached out to us. They are in contact with my office. They are working. I will meet with their delegation during the General Assembly meeting. And they sent to the Security Council and to my office a communique in which they engaged to, they committed themselves to end the recruitment of children in the groups that are affiliated to them. And they send me a letter also asking for moving on the action plan. So we are working with the country team on the ground because it is not my office who will implement an action plan, it is the U.N.

Mr. McGOVERN. It is probably too early to figure out whether or not everybody is keeping their word.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. But that is why I think because of what has happened that now we have support to arm and train these troops if we include your own legislation to not support armies that have children in their ranks as we did in other places. For example, this is an opportunity.

Mr. McGOVERN. But sometimes we waive that, that is what worries me. I mean, I don't want to get into an argument over what we just talked about yesterday because I am not as enthusiastic as those who supported it.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Yeah.

Mr. McGOVERN. But when we talk about vetting soldiers and who we are going to train and equip, I hope that the vetting includes something along the lines of that we

are not going to engage in a training and equipping program if you are going to go back and utilize child soldiers to fight, and it is not just that the vetting means that you are not going to be a member of a terrorist organization, that we identify as a terrorist organization, that human rights is a lot more than that.

And I have never been quite clear on what the vetting of this force actually means other than if you are a member of Al Qaeda we are not going to train and equip you, I mean. But would it mean if an individual is guilty of human rights violations, even if they are sympathetic to our point of view, whether we would deny that, or if they are part of a unit that continues to utilize child soldiers, would that be a disqualifier. And I think there is a lot of questions.

And the legislation is written in a way that it is open to interpretation. I mean, I think if we had people from the administration here they would reassure us that they are very much concerned about human rights, but there is nothing specifically that spells out in any detail, in any specificity. So I think it is something we are going to have to watch, and it is something that those of us in Congress as the administration is about to embark on this policy ought to make sure that this is part of that criteria.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. I think that what I can say, that, for example, I give the example when they were working in DR Congo I was there at the time the Deputy Special Representative, and I remember that the United States, they issued always a partial waiver, but they asked the United Nations to provide them with information on commanders that are problematic, to not include them in the training and support. So I think that you could also ask for the same with regard to the FSA, because I think it is not only about being seen not supporting criminals, but it is also the way that people that are victims on the ground would perceive you, because if you provide support to people, to individuals or groups that commit a lot of atrocities among the civilians, it is also something that will undermine your own position in the region.

So it is absolutely important that war criminals that are identified, because they are well known in their area, even more than in other places, because that is the place where they commit atrocities, and for those who are recruiting children at least to put in place a verification age mechanism, that would be great. We would like to see some mainstreaming of the Child Act in the support, that will be helpful.

And my office, for example, we gather information. We don't have all the information, but we have the GHN, the Global Horizontal Note, that we share with the government of the United States as a member of the Security Council. Every 3 months they receive, they have the latest information on every country on our agenda. And we generally, when we have a serious violation of human rights committed, we provide the information, it is in the GHN.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me just ask you a couple more questions here. What is your reading on the current state of child protection in Iraq?

Ms. ZERROUGUI. I mean, the situation in Iraq is a disaster. It is terrible. If you see our report 2012 and 2013, in 2012 we said that the violence doubled in comparison to last year. In 2013 we said it doubled in comparison with 2012. And then we have the big crisis that started this year with ISIL. It is exactly the consequences, first of all, weakness of the institution, a lot of problems, violation of human rights ongoing, marginalization of part of the society. So all these create grievance that open doors to extremists.

I mean, ISIL, before going to Syria they were in Iraq. They went to Syria and they returned to Iraq. And now the major challenge that we have, that they are in control of large portions of Syria and Iraq, and populations are under their control.

And as I said at the beginning, in all these contexts these are young populations. That means that in the Arab world 49 percent of the population is under 18, and in some areas there are even more. So of course children are caught in this. They are recruited, they are killed there. We saw images of barbarism that we cannot imagine. I mean, I saw children sitting in front of execution, beheading of people. So all the violations are committed against children. And the worst, and sometimes we forget, girls, girls are paying a very high price. They are not anymore going to schools. Early marriage come back. They are also, when we talk marriages, between brackets because sometimes they are just forced to marry a combatant.

Mr. McGOVERN. Let me finally ask you, in June 2014 as part of the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, the U.S. Department of State released the latest list of countries implicated in recruiting and using child soldiers pursuant to the Child Soldiers Protection Act of 2008. In your view is that list complete? Are there countries that should be on there that are not on there?

Ms. ZERROUGUI. I think the countries that are on our list for recruitment, they are on the list. I think I am not wrong. They are. Because they generally ask for information, and we try to also influence according to what we would like to see when we see, for example, an opportunity to move forward. We are insisting for South Sudan, for example, today. A lot of children are recruited. I know that last year South Sudan benefited from a waiver. We hope that this year they will not, really we hope they will not.

Sometimes we encourage the waiver because if there is a trend to move forward in the right direction. So we say, yes, go ahead. We have, for example, a country that signed an action plan, that would like to be supported, the political will is there, we would like to see move on the implementation, provide support to strengthen the capacity. We sometimes ask the government to issue a waiver because it will help the strong political will that we already assessed. But when you don't have political will, then you need to put the pressure. And, for example, South Sudan, they signed an action plan.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. They recommitted. But every day I receive reports on huge number of children recruited, schools occupied, killing and maiming of children alongside of their ethnicity, and this is not acceptable from both sides.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, maybe that is a message that we can reinforce to the administration and to the government of South Sudan.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Please, yes. Yes.

Mr. McGOVERN. And I will just close by saying I appreciate all the great work that your office does, and that we want to be regarded as an entity here that wants to support initiatives that help advance the cause of human rights, and in this case end the recruiting of young children, the exploitation of young children in times of war. So we hope that you will not hesitate to make some suggestions. And even if it is I will say this off the record even if it is to put a little pressure on our government to do a little bit more, we are happy to work with you. I mean, this is an important issue, and it is not enough just to say it is a problem. We need to make sure that when we have policies, that we follow through on them and that we are serious about this. Otherwise countries that are not in compliance will not comply.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. That is true.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much for being here. Appreciate it.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity. I really appreciate it, and I am sure that this will allow us to have more support.

Mr. McGOVERN. Absolutely.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. And we will continue to be in touch with you, and anything that you think we can provide, we would be happy to do. And I am sure that my team will certainly catch the opportunity, we will not

Mr. McGOVERN. Because I think one of the things that we can do here is be a clearinghouse for other Members of Congress who know a little bit about this issue, but in terms of getting some of the information that your office provides out to more Members of Congress, and even thinking of ways to put pressure on other countries, we would like to work with you. So we appreciate it very much. Thank you.

Ms. ZERROUGUI. Thank you very much.

Mr. McGOVERN. Our next panel is going to be Jesse Eaves, who is the senior policy director for child protection at World Vision; Lisa Dougan, the director of international programs at Invisible Children; and Aldo Civico, assistant professor of anthropology at Rutgers University.

Who wants to go first? Mr. Eaves? Welcome.

STATEMENTS OF JESSE EAVES, SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR FOR CHILD PROTECTION, WORLD VISION; LISA DOUGAN, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS, INVISIBLE CHILDREN; AND ALDO CIVICO, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY, RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

STATEMENT OF JESSE EAVES

Mr. EAVES. Thank you so much, Congressman, and it is really a pleasure to be here with you today. You have been on the forefront of these issues for so long. And really just thrilled to have this opportunity. And thank you for taking the time out of campaigning and being in your district to be here with us right now. We really appreciate it.

This is a truly important hearing, and it really is a crucial opportunity to shine a light on what is being done globally to address the use of child soldiers and discuss specifically how the U.S. can strengthen its role in being a positive force in these efforts. I definitely want to thank my fellow panelists here and the SRSG, Leila Zerrougui, for being here today. As our written testimony highlights, the SRSG's office has been an extremely valuable resource for civil society, the U.S. Government, and countries that are using children in their militaries, and the concerted efforts of Ms. Zerrougui and her predecessor, Radhika Coomaraswamy, have really resulted in tangible action plans to end the use of child soldiers, and they have achieved that in almost all of the currently listed countries that are using children in their national armies.

So I represent World Vision. A bit about us. We are an international Christian organization that focuses on relief, development, and advocacy. We serve millions of children and their families around the world in about 100 countries. We have got about 45,000 employees, and they are really dedicated towards addressing the root causes of poverty and injustice.

Mr. McGOVERN. And I should have begun by thanking all the people at World Vision too. We are big fans of the work you do. I have actually worked with World Vision on international school feeding programs, and so I am well aware of all the work.

Mr. EAVES. Thank you.

Mr. McGOVERN. And so I should have said thank you in advance.

Mr. EAVES. We work extensively in conflict zones all around the world and have really seen firsthand the devastating impacts that armed conflict has on children. And prior to coming to D.C., I myself worked with former child soldiers in northern Uganda, so this issue is deeply personal for me. And so when we were asked to testify today, we definitely jumped at the chance because we really want to talk about our experience in advocating for and now seeking positive implementation of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008.

My written testimony kind of lays out the full history of the purpose of the law, the turbulent rollout and subsequent implementation and recommendations for Congress. Today I really want to focus on two things, and that is the purpose and function of the law and the opportunities and tools that are available to the U.S. Government to ensure that children are not used as weapons of war.

So in December 2008, as you are well aware because you were an original cosponsor and voted for it, Congress unanimously passed the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, if you think about the incredible feat that was, especially in today's current climate. At that time there were eight countries using children in their national armies, and the U.S. was giving military aid to seven of those.

The law was designed to turn U.S. Government complicity in the use of child soldiers into a solution to the problem. And the law has a simple purpose, and that is to prevent U.S. taxpayer money from supporting militaries that use child soldiers. And the CSPA was never intended to be a silver bullet to stop the use of all child soldiers. It really carries no weight with nonstate actors and nonstate militias around the world. The law states clearly that the focus is on countries that are using children in their national militaries or are supporting militias or paramilitary groups that are using children. And these countries, if they are found to be using children, they are listed in the Trafficking of Persons Report and then are supposed to be put on basically a 5 year clock. During that time their access to U.S. military aid is severely limited.

So during that 5 year clock any country can continue to receive aid that will help them demobilize children and professionalize their armed forces, and after those 5 years expire, if nothing happens, then they are cut off completely until they are fully compliant. But the interesting thing about the law is that it provided a loophole in which the President can use a national interest waiver, which is fairly common. However, it is always intended to be a tool of last resort. And with the listing of a country and the 5 year compliance clock and providing certain types of aid to help these countries, there was always other ways for this law to be a carrot and a stick, to be a positive influence while also holding governments accountable.

But what we have seen over the last 4 years with the implementation of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act is that the option of last resort has become the de facto first response, and the use of these national interest waivers, the full blanket waivers, as a first option undermines the entire intent of the law and enables consistent perpetrators to escape accountability.

World Vision runs programs all over the world, as we have mentioned, and we have seen firsthand the damage that war does to children, and the use of blanket waivers is inherently dangerous to children. At a time when Congress is locked in some fierce debates over government budgets and spending, World Vision views it as shameful that a portion of Federal funding would continue to support governments that are visibly complicit in the use of child soldiers.

And yet there have been positive steps. Over the past few years the administration has made improvements in their implementation of the CSPA. In 2011 they introduced the concept of partial waivers, which in our mind is pretty much the same thing as if they just let the law do its work and you place them on the 5 year clock, they are allowed to receive certain forms of military aid. But in any case they allowed these partial waivers to go through. They started with DRC, and we actually saw that this maneuver was effective because in 2012, as the SRSB mentioned, DRC signed on to an action plan finally with the United Nations after stalling for several years.

And so, as has been mentioned, in June of this year the State Department issued its latest list of governments who are recruiting and using children, and the number of countries this year has dropped from 10 to 9, which is encouraging, and those countries, just for the record, are Burma, or Myanmar, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Yemen, and Syria. The administration has requested military assistance for six of these nine countries, and I should point out that of those six countries, five are labeled as persistent perpetrators by the U.N.

I really want to highlight South Sudan. So last year South Sudan received a full waiver from the U.S. Government, as the SRSB pointed out, and they were able to receive all forms of military assistance. The President actually cited progress in the government of South Sudan's renewed commitment to their 2012 action plan with the U.N. However, when the intense conflict broke out in December of 2013, the U.S. to its credit suspended all military assistance to South Sudan. We applauded that decision. All reports indicate that prior to the conflict the government of South Sudan was making progress on their action plan, but now we have found and the U.N. has found that both sides are now complicit in the recruitment and use of child soldiers. And for fiscal year 2015 the administration has requested assistance that is sanctionable under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act, and World Vision strongly recommends that the administration at this time withhold all forms of military assistance to South Sudan. We do not want to see a full waiver to South Sudan this year, especially given just the current state and the way that children are being treated overall in that country.

And we would also further recommend that the administration clearly state what criteria the government of South Sudan must put into place for military assistance to resume. We also recommend that Congress exercise active oversight over how the administration engages the government of South Sudan on the use of child soldiers. I mean, we really must follow the intent of the law and really ensure that, again, U.S. taxpayer dollars do not contribute to prolonging this conflict or increasing the use and suffering of child soldiers.

So I have several recommendations that are in my written testimony. I will focus on just kind of the three top lines. First, for Congress, we really want to make sure that Congress monitors the use of blanket waivers, these full waivers that the administration has still been issuing. Second, we want to make sure the Government Accountability Office is asked to investigate and report on the U.S. Government's implementation of the

CSPA. It would be interesting to know how much money has gone to all these countries and when they have withheld money and when they have let it go through.

And finally, and this was just mentioned by the SRSG, which I was thrilled to hear, when you think about a birth certificate and birth registration, you don't always think about child soldiers. However, a birth certificate is the first line of defense in helping to stop the underage recruitment and use of child soldiers and getting children out of military service once they are found serving in a unit.

Every year, UNICEF has estimated, there are 51 million children who are never registered at birth, and in Sub Saharan Africa, where six of the nine listed countries are located, only 38 percent of African children are currently registered. And right now there is a bill, the Girls Count Act, it is H.R. 3398, which we encourage Congress to pass and support the U.S. Government's birth registration efforts that are ongoing.

So finally, Congress has given the administration good tools, and we want to make sure the oversight continues, and it is just critical that we put these tools to work. And, again, thank you for holding this hearing and continuing to shine a light on this issue, and we are really excited to continue to work with your office, with the Commission, and any other committees that are interested in this issue. So I look forward to your questions. Thank you.

[The statement of Mr. Eaves follows:]

Prepared Statement of Jesse Eaves

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this important hearing and inviting World Vision to testify. This Commission has been a leader in the fight against child soldiers and your past efforts have contributed to an increased US focus on the larger issue of children affected by armed conflict. This hearing is an opportunity to shine a light on what is being done globally to address the use of child soldiers and discuss how the US can strengthen its positive role in those efforts.

World Vision is a Christian relief, development, and advocacy organization serving millions of children and families in nearly 100 countries. Our 45,000 employees are dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to tackle the root causes of poverty and injustice. This work includes emergency relief and preparedness for people impacted by natural disasters and armed conflict; long-term economic development; preventing and responding to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children; mobilizing children, youth and local communities to hold their governments accountable; and advocating for effective systems, laws, and policies that protect vulnerable populations where the social fabric is especially weak.

World Vision US has more than one million private donors in every state and Congressional district, partners with over 16,000 churches in the United States, and works with corporations and foundations. We are part of the global federation of World Vision International, which last year implemented more than \$2.6 billion in programming to help children and communities through international relief, development, and advocacy assistance. Although private donors support much of our work, the US Government is an invaluable partner. We leverage this partnership to reach many more children at-risk and ensure that the precious resources of the American taxpayer are prudently used to promote and protect the well-being of children and communities abroad. However, today we wish to highlight taxpayer dollars being spent imprudently to support armies that use children, maintaining a roadblock to many of the gains we as an organization and as a community have made in the past decade.

World Vision has been asked to testify about our experience advocating for the passage and implementation of the Child Soldier Prevention Act, as well as the impact of conflict on children around the world. Our testimony will discuss the purpose of the Child Soldier Prevention Act of 2008; the turbulent roll-out and subsequent implementation of that law; and recommendations for Congress and the Administration to make sure that the law lives up to its mission. The opportunity is now, and tools are available, for the US Government to engage positively and forcefully so that children are not used as weapons of war.

In December 2008, Congress unanimously passed the Child Soldier Prevention Act or CSPA (22 USC §2370) as Title IV of the larger Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (22 USC §2151). The passage of the legislation (and the signing of the bill into law by President Bush) marked the completion of a six year advocacy effort from a bipartisan group of Representatives and Senators, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), students, churches, and other US citizens from across the country. At the time, several high-profile conflicts around the world featured the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The United Nations Special Rapporteur to the Secretary General (SRSG) on Children in Armed Conflict estimated that a quarter of a million children were actively serving in militaries and armed groups around the world.¹ By 2007, there were eight countries in the world using children in their national armies and the US Government was providing military assistance to seven of them.² The law was designed to turn US Government complicity in the use of child soldiers into a solution to the problem.

The law has a simple purpose: to prevent US taxpayer money from supporting militaries that use child soldiers³. The CSPA was never intended by Congress to be a silver bullet for stopping all use of child soldiers. The law carries no weight over the use of children by non-state affiliated armed groups. The law states that any country that has a national army that recruits or uses children in any capacity – or supports any militias and/or other paramilitary groups that do the same – will be listed in the State Department’s annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. Any of the listed countries that receive US military assistance would then lose access to certain kinds of military assistance, until the national government de-mobilized all children in the ranks or cut off its own support and assistance to militia and/or paramilitary groups that used children. The list of applicable military assistance includes Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), Direct Commercial Sales (DCS) of military equipment, Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Excess Defense Articles (EDA), Section 1206 Security Assistance Program, and (as of March 2013) Peacekeeping Operations (PKO). The eligible forms of assistance are listed in Section 404(a) of the law.

Section 404 is the heart of the CSPA. In addition to naming the eligible forms of assistance that can be withheld, it also lays out how the US Government will identify and notify countries in violation of the standards laid out in the law; where the list of violating countries will be listed; how the countries will be notified; and how assistance can be re-instated. Congress designed the law to be a stick and a carrot. Under Section 404(e) of the law, any country found to be in violation would be placed on a five year clock. During this time, the country could continue to receive certain forms of US military assistance that would enable the de-mobilization of child soldiers and the professionalization of the military. Over the five years, a country would be required to demonstrate the steps it was taking to de-mobilize children and professionalize its armies, militias, and paramilitaries. If after five years, the listed country was still found to be in violation, then all forms of US military aid would be cut off until the country fully complied with the law.

Section 404 also provides the President with the option to issue a National Interest Waiver. Since implementation began in 2010, the President has stated said that waiving the requirements of the CSPA for

¹ UN Document A/60/335, September 7, 2005.

² US Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights, 2007.

³ Section 402 of the law defines a child soldier as any person under the age of 18 who takes direct part in hostilities as a member of government armed forces, or who has been compulsorily recruited into government armed forces, or who has been recruited or used in hostilities by a non-state group, or any person under 15 who has been voluntarily recruited into government armed forces.

certain countries is in the national interest of the US.⁴ Using the National Interest Waiver was always intended to be a tool of last resort. The listing of the country, the five year compliance clock, and providing certain types of professionalization assistance were all intended to hold allies accountable while also engaging them to improve their performance. However, once implementation of the law began, the Administration seemed to undermine the law from the start.

The last four years have been a frustrating journey in the implementation of the CSPA. Because the law did not go into effect until 2010, the Administration had two years to prepare itself and the listed countries for the enforcement of the law and subsequent effect on military assistance. However, beginning with a tersely worded announcement in late September of 2010, the Administration ignored the intent of the law and opted to give National Interest Waivers to every listed country.⁵ The option of last resort became the de facto first response. While the White House claimed this was an attempt to “name and shame” countries in-violation within the first year of implementation,⁶ the objections from Congress and NGOs like World Vision were immediate.⁷

The overall reaction was, and continues to be, that the use of National Interest Waivers as a first option undermines the very intent of the law and enables consistent perpetrators to escape accountability. World Vision runs programs all over the world that have provided services and support for former child soldiers. We see first-hand how serving as a soldier damages or even destroys a child and the child’s future. The use of blanket waivers, rather than strategically engaging countries in violation of the standards of the CSPA as the law intended, is inherently dangerous for children. The Administration’s use of blanket waivers is particularly concerning, for it ignores the five year compliance clock. Rather than placing countries on the clock and helping them professionalize their armed forces and de-mobilize children, the Administration has used waivers, thereby allowing countries to be serial offenders and still have access to the full scope of US military assistance without the pressure of losing that assistance.

Another early, troubling misstep was the failure of the Administration to set benchmarks for countries to come into compliance with the CSPA. The law is clear: once a country is placed on the five year clock, it can continue to receive certain military assistance if it shows it is taking effective measures to professionalize its militaries, de-mobilize children, and re-integrate children into their communities. However, by issuing blanket waivers, the Administration let governments in violation off the hook, thus sending a message (however unintended) that countries could continue to receive US military assistance without regard to the recruitment and use of child soldiers. At a time when Congress engages in difficult debates over government budgets and spending, World Vision views it as shameful that a portion of Federal funding would continue to support governments that were visibly complicit in the use of child soldiers.

Over the past four years, the Administration has made improvements in the implementation of the CSPA. After the initial misguided decisions in 2010, the State Department took part in an open dialogue with NGOs and the UN on the implementation of the CSPA. In 2011, the Administration introduced the use of partial waivers – withholding some funding from the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) while continuing to provide key funding for training and professionalization. The State Department and the Administration also started raising the issue of child soldiers during high-level visits to the countries in violation of the CSPA. As a result, the US placed real pressure on countries in violation of the

⁴ Section 404(c)

⁵ Barack Obama, “Presidential Memorandum—Child Soldiers Prevention Act.” *White House*. Issued October 25, 2010. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/25/presidential-memorandum-child-soldiers-prevention-act>

⁶ Josh Rogin, “Cable exclusive: Inside the White House conference call on child soldiers.” *The Cable*. Published October 29, 2010. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/29/cable_exclusive_the_secret_white_house_conference_call_on_child_soldiers

⁷ See attached document Appendix A for complete list of articles chronicling the past four years of CSPA implementation.

CSPA to take serious steps to end their use of child soldiers. These efforts signaled that the Administration was beginning to take the use of child soldiers seriously enough to take more substantive action.

These efforts on the part of the US also had a positive impact on the work of the United Nations and the SRSG's office. For example, in 2011, the US Government began withholding some military aid and constructively engaging the DRC government. After that, for the first time, we began to see concrete efforts to begin to address the issue within the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the DRC national army. This helped lead to DRC signing onto an Action Plan with the United Nations in 2012. The concerted efforts of former SRSG Radhika Coomaraswamy and her successor, Leila Zerrougui, have resulted in this and other tangible Action Plans to end the use of child soldiers within almost all of the currently listed countries.⁸

During this time, the office of the SRSG has been an extremely valuable resource for civil society, the US Government, and countries using children in their militaries. The development and ratification of Country Action Plans have given the State Department and the rest of the Administration clear benchmarks for measuring progress in addressing child soldiers. Furthermore, the annual report of the SRSG on the use of children in armed conflict continues to be an invaluable tool for gauging how far countries in violation of the CSPA and international standards relating to the recruitment and use of children need to go to be in compliance.

The Administration can currently use these tools to improve implementation of the CSPA, and hopefully the lives of thousands of children still serving in national militaries and affiliated armed groups. In June 2014, the State Department issued the fifth annual list of governments that recruit or use children. This year the number of countries dropped from ten to nine. The nine countries are Burma (Myanmar), Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. The UN Secretary General has named five of these countries persistent perpetrators.⁹ The Administration has requested military assistance that is sanctionable under the CSPA for six of the nine countries.¹⁰

One notable country is South Sudan. Last year, South Sudan received a full waiver from the US Government to continue to receive all forms of military assistance, citing the Government of South Sudan's (GoSS) and its Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) renewed commitment to the 2012 Action Plan with the UN to end grave violations against children. However, when intense conflict broke out in December 2013, the US suspended all military assistance to South Sudan. All reports indicate that prior to the conflict, GoSS was making progress on the Action Plan. However, the UN now finds that both sides in the conflict, including the SPLA and its affiliated militias, are recruiting and using child soldiers.¹¹ The Administration has requested sanctionable and unsanctionable assistance for the SPLA for FY15. It is unclear how and when US military assistance to South Sudan will resume. **World Vision strongly recommends that the Administration withhold all forms of military assistance to South Sudan.** Furthermore, we recommend that the Administration clearly state what criteria the SPLA and GOSS must meet for the US to resume military assistance. We also recommend that Congress exercise active oversight over how the Administration engages the SPLA and GoSS over the use of child soldiers to ensure that US taxpayer dollars do not contribute to prolonging the conflict and increasing the use and suffering of child soldiers.

⁸ Burma (Myanmar), Central African Republic (CAR), DRC, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen. CAR, Rwanda, and Syria do not have Action Plans. For CAR, the government is not stable enough to sign onto a plan; for Rwanda, they can come into compliance by ceasing support of the M23 militia in DRC. Despite concerted efforts by the U.N. the Syrian government appears not to have substantively engaged in this process.

⁹ Burma (Myanmar), DRC, Somalia, South Sudan, and Sudan

¹⁰ Burma, CAR, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia, and Yemen.

¹¹ UN Secretary-General, Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict, S/2014/339, paragraph 7, <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N14/315/83/PDF/N1431583.pdf?OpenElement>

Congress has given the Administration good tools. It is critical that we work together so these tools are used and not left to rust in the toolbox. Thank you again for holding this hearing and for continuing to shine a light on the plight of child soldiers around the world. World Vision is committed to working with the Commission on these critical issues and I look forward to answering your questions.

Recommendations for Congress

- Monitor the use of blanket National Interest Waivers and discourage the use of full waivers whenever possible.
- Whenever and wherever possible, remind the Administration of Congressional intent for the CSPA and require the Administration to adhere to it.
- Ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate and report on the US Government's implementation of the CSPA.
- Encourage the Administration to withhold military assistance sanctionable under the CSPA and combine this withholding with high-level diplomatic engagement of each of the listed countries eligible under the CSPA.
- Encourage the Administration and State Department to continue to use the Action Plans negotiated by the SRSG's office as the benchmarks for progress under the CSPA.
- Birth registration impacts all aspects of a child's well-being. A birth certificate is the first line of defense in helping stop the underage recruitment and use of children into military service. According to UNICEF, every year, 51 million children are never registered at birth, leaving them without an official name or nationality. In Sub-Saharan Africa (where six of the nine of the listed countries are located¹²), only 38% of African children currently registered. Congress should support current US Government birth registration efforts by passing the Girls Count Act (H.R. 3398 and S.2591).

Appendix A

List of Child Soldiers Prevention Act Press Articles in Chronological Order:

1. Barack Obama, "Presidential Memorandum—Child Soldiers Prevention Act." *White House*. Issued October 25, 2010. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/10/25/presidential-memorandum-child-soldiers-prevention-act> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
2. Josh Rogin, "Why is Obama easing restrictions on child soldiers?" *The Cable*. Published October 26, 2010. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/26/why_is_obama_easing_restrictions_on_child_soldiers (Accessed September 15, 2014).
3. Brian Knowlton, "4 Nations with Child Soldiers Keep US Aid." *New York Times*. Published October 28, 2010. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/29/world/africa/29soldiers.html?_r=0 (Accessed September 15, 2014).
4. Josh Rogin, "Child soldiers backlash: White House argues continuing military assistance more important than enforcing law." *The Cable*. Published October 28, 2010. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/28/child_soldiers_backlash_white_house_argues_continuing_military_assistance_more_important (Accessed September 15, 2014).
5. Josh Rogin, "Cable exclusive: The secret Obama memo on child soldiers." *The Cable*. Published October 28, 2010. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/28/cable_exclusive_the_secret_obama_administration_memo_on_child_soldiers (Accessed September 15, 2014).
6. Josh Rogin, "Cable exclusive: Inside the White House conference call on child soldiers." *The Cable*. Published October 29, 2010. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/10/29/cable_exclusive_the_secret_white_house_conference_call_on_child_soldiers (Accessed October 29, 2010).

¹² Central Africa Republic, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan

7. Rachel Stohl, "Should the US Pay for Child Soldiers?" Sojourners. Published February 2011. Available at <http://sojo.net/magazine/2011/02/should-us-pay-child-soldiers> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
8. "Memorandum of Justification Regarding the Certification and Determinations Pursuant to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008." *Foreign Policy*. 2011. Available at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/111004_2011%20CSPA%20PD%20MOJ.pdf (Accessed September 15, 2014).
9. Larry Cox (*Amnesty International USA*), Kenneth Roth (*Human Rights Watch*), Aryeh Neier (*Open Society Foundations*), Richard Stearns (*World Vision*), "Letter to President Obama regarding US implementation of the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008." Human Rights Watch. Published April 12, 2011. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/12/letter-president-obama-regarding-us-implementation-child-soldiers-prevention-act-200> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
10. Barack Obama, "Memorandum for the Secretary of State." *White House*. Issued October 4, 2011. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/10/04/presidential-memorandum-child-soldiers-prevention-act-2008> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
11. Jo Becker, "US: Don't Finance Child Soldiers." *Human Rights Watch*. Published October 4, 2011. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/10/04/us-don-t-finance-child-soldiers> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
12. Josh Rogin, "Obama waives penalties on countries that employ child soldiers – again!" *The Cable*. Published October 4, 2011. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/04/obama_waives_penalties_on_countries_that_employ_child_soldiers_again (Accessed September 15, 2014).
13. Avni Patel, "Obama Waives Child Soldier ban in Yemen and Congo." *ABC News*. Published October 5, 2011. Available at <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/obama-waives-child-soldier-ban-yemen-congo/story?id=14663930> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
14. Jesse Eaves, "Should US give a free pass to countries that use child soldiers?" *World Vision*. Published October 25, 2011. Available at <http://blog.worldvision.org/advocacy/should-u-s-give-a-free-pass-to-countries-that-use-child-soldiers> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
15. Chuck Neubauer, "US gives military aid to nations with child soldiers." *Washington Times*. Published August 8, 2012. Available at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/aug/8/us-gives-military-aid-to-nations-with-child-soldier/?page=all> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
16. Barack Obama, "Presidential Memorandum – Presidential Determination with respect to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act of 2008." *White House*. Issued September 28, 2012. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/28/presidential-memorandum-presidential-determination-respect-child-soldier> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
17. Josh Rogin, "Obama waives sanctions on the countries that use child soldiers." *The Cable*. Published October 1, 2012. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/10/01/obama_waives_sanctions_on_countries_that_use_child_soldiers (Accessed October September 15, 2014).
18. "US: Act to Protect Children in Conflict." *Human Rights Watch*. Published February 5, 2013. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/02/05/us-act-protect-children-conflict> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
19. Josh Rogin, "U.N. committee tells Obama to stop waiving sanctions on countries that use child soldiers." *The Cable*. Published February 5, 2013. Available at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/05/un_committee_tells_obama_to_stop_waiving_sanctions_on_countries_that_use_child_soldier (Accessed September 15, 2014).
20. Barack Obama, "Presidential Determination – Child Soldiers." *White House*. Released September 30, 2013. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/30/presidential-memorandum-determination-respect-child-soldiers-preventio-0> (Accessed September 15, 2014).
21. Hayes Brown, "US Approves Military Aid for Countries With Child Soldiers." *ThinkProgress*. Published October 1, 2013. Available at <http://thinkprogress.org/security/2013/10/01/2704611/child-soldier-waivers/>

Appendix 2

Obama Administration Waivers (2010-2013) Child Soldier Prevention Act

2010	2011	2012	2013
Chad (waived)	Chad (waived)		Chad (waived)
DRC (waived)	DRC (<i>partial</i> waiver)	DRC (<i>partial</i> waiver)	DRC (<i>partial</i> waiver)
Sudan (waived)			
		South Sudan (waived)	South Sudan (waived)
Yemen (waived)	Yemen (waived)	Yemen (waived)	Yemen (waived)
		Libya (waived)	
			Somalia (<i>partial</i> waiver)

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you.

Ms. Dougan. And before you begin, I just want to thank you and all those with Invisible Children who, along with Resolve, have done so much to bring the LRA to the attention of elected officials like me and the public, and you have mobilized so many young people who have made a real difference in Uganda and the DRC to help provide support to communities and to mobilize child soldiers.

And as I was mentioning before, I think the more people are forced to think about this issue, the more people want to do something, and especially amongst young people all across this country, all across the world who want to be part of a movement to make the world a better place, and this is an area that kids can understand.

We had the KONY 2012 campaign. My own kids learned more about that campaign in school than they did from me. But I think it just shows the power that information provides in terms of changing things. But we have to talk about it, because if we don't talk about it then nothing changes.

But in any event, welcome. Nice to see you again.

STATEMENT OF LISA DOUGAN

Ms. DOUGAN. Thank you so much, Congressman. You stole my testimony from me, but thank you very much. And I can return the thanks. It has been such an honor to work with you and to have your leadership in Washington on the issue of the LRA. And thank you so much for your leadership of this commission and for having this conversation today. You clearly have such deep, personal conviction regarding the issue of child soldiers, and it is really a pleasure to be here today. I also want to thank SRSG Zerrougui for her remarks and my panelists as well.

And just as you were just saying, Congressman McGovern, I want to start off by emphasizing that this is a conversation that millions of young people around the United States would be very encouraged to know is happening in Washington, D.C., today. Since Invisible Children's beginnings 10 years ago, we have witnessed the power, the creativity, the relentless commitment of young Americans confronted with the crimes of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, crimes against people their own age happening on the other side of the world. And for the past several years, hundreds of thousands of American youth have engaged their policymakers, as you know very well, with thousands of lobby meetings, tens of thousands of letters, countless phone calls, they have rallied in the streets, they have slept on the concrete, all to raise the banner for fellow youth being forced to fight and kill as soldiers.

And because of their tireless advocacy and the committed leadership of policymakers like yourself in Washington, Congress unanimously passed the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act in May 2010. That required President Obama to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the LRA, which he released in November of 2010. And 1 year later, he announced the deployment of 100 U.S. military advisers to assist in regional efforts to address the LRA and help the group's child abductees safely return home.

As a result of those efforts over the past 3 years, U.S. involvement has contributed to a significant reduction in abductions and killings by the LRA. And we at Invisible Children have been able to help build on that progress to ensure that this mission fully succeeds through both advocacy here in the United States, as well as on the ground programs and collaborative relationships with local communities and with government actors, including the U.S. military.

While much remains to be done to finally apprehend Kony and to ensure that his child soldiers are safely reintegrated back into society, I believe that the progress that has been made thus far deserves to be examined as a positive example of American leadership and how it can support the peaceful ambitions of people everywhere to put an end to the use of children as soldiers.

I believe from Invisible Children's experience addressing the LRA there may be a helpful model or helpful examples that could be used in other contexts with child soldiers, particularly involving illegal armed groups. And so with that said, I wanted to

focus my time today on three key aspects of our work: first, encouraging peaceful defections; secondly, supporting the reintegration of former child soldiers; and thirdly, building the capacity of local communities to protect themselves and their own children from the threat of abduction and forced recruitment.

So first in regard to peaceful defections. Given the very obvious complexities involved with stopping an armed group that is comprised almost entirely of combatants that were abducted as children, defection initiatives are both a moral imperative and a very effective strategy to peacefully dismantle the LRA from within.

For the past 3 years, Invisible Children has worked in collaboration with local communities and with the U.S. military to create and to disseminate defection messages that address the fears, the lies, the shame, and even the physical barriers that keep LRA members from trying to return home.

Printed fliers with "come home" messages and photographs of defectors that have safely gotten home are dropped aurally over areas of known LRA activity with the help of the U.S. advisers, as well as audio recordings of LRA defectors encouraging their fellow abductees to peacefully surrender are broadcast over FM radio, shortwave radio, and also, with the help of U.S. advisers, they are broadcast via helicopter mounted speakers over areas where the LRA is known to move.

With those kind of efforts, since January 2012 more than 300 core LRA fighters and long term women and children captives have made the brave choice to defect from the LRA. And among those that Invisible Children has interviewed, 89 percent have said that defection messaging had an influence in their decision to escape. So that is 9 out of 10 that we have interviewed.

Also, while encouraging defections, it is really important to ensure that communities in the region are properly sensitized, equipped, and willing to safely receive defectors upon their escape and to support their return home. Over the past year, Invisible Children has implemented these kind of sensitization and training programs across DRC and CAR, and we have seen multiple communities, once fearful and very hostile towards LRA defectors, now readily and courageously supporting their defection.

And as I mentioned, also key to the success of these efforts has been the increasing willingness of the U.S. advisers to work collaboratively with NGOs like Invisible Children and with local communities. Recognizing that the involvement of U.S. forces is not always going to be appropriate or possible in other contexts, where the U.S. forces are present we want to strongly recommend that this kind of collaborative and coordinated effort is prioritized.

Secondly, regarding the integration of former child soldiers, once an LRA captive takes the very courageous and scary step of leaving the battlefield they are often risking their own life in the process of doing so there comes an entirely new battle, and that is of reintegrating back into civilian life and establishing a new livelihood. And as has been

mentioned before, for women and girls this has the added difficulty oftentimes of caring for children that were born in captivity as a result of years of sexual slavery.

So that being said, holistic, community based reintegration programs are urgently needed for children, young adults, and women coming out of the LRA, as well as the families and communities receiving them home. Unfortunately, while we have seen very encouraging levels of investment in the defection side of counter LRA efforts, and this must continue, the international community has largely neglected the reintegration needs in the area.

Invisible Children currently provides reintegration support to LRA returnees in Uganda, in partnership with World Vision actually, and we provide immediate assistance to those coming out of the LRA in DRC and CAR whenever we can, but even our efforts are addressing just a small fraction of the need that exists. The United States and other donors should increase support for community based programs providing reintegration support for former LRA combatants and captives in DRC, CAR, South Sudan, and Uganda, for the very same reasons that you brought up, Congressman McGovern, that you saw in El Salvador and Colombia, as well. And I really do want to emphasize that these funds should be channeled to community based programs to ensure that the impact of resources truly hit the ground and to ensure that programs are culturally relevant and sustained by the ownership of the local community.

Lastly, in regards to equipping communities to protect their own children. While defection efforts and these holistic reintegration programs that I have mentioned are both critical components to addressing the ongoing use of child soldiers, I know that our ultimate desire is to prevent this phenomenon from happening in the first place. And in that regard, we must recognize that abduction and coercion of children by armed groups always arises in communities that are already extremely vulnerable.

In the case of the Lord's Resistance Army, Joseph Kony has always targeted marginalized communities. They are far from the centers of government in their respective countries, they are severely lacking in infrastructure and economic opportunities, and thus they are extremely vulnerable to predatory groups like the LRA. This reality was starkly illustrated in the Makombo massacre in DRC where the LRA committed a string of attacks over several days, ultimately killing 321 civilians, including a 3 year old girl who was burned alive by the LRA. They abducted 250 others, including at least 80 children. The massacre took place in such a remote area of DRC, lacking any communication mechanisms, that it allowed the LRA to easily kill scores of children and adults in town after town, and the international community didn't know about it for months.

While it is absolutely necessary to keep states accountable to their duty to protect their own citizens from violence, we have found in the context of the LRA, and in places like Makombo specifically, that it is also vitally important to equip communities to protect their own children and to build their resilience. One way Invisible Children is addressing this needs is through the development of an early warning HF radio network

which enables communities to alert each other, as well as security forces in the region of LRA attacks and movements. Through this simple, locally run network, communities that have historically been left completely vulnerable are now central agents in their own protection. Additionally, the daily stream of reliable information about LRA attacks and abductions allows for increased accountability for the national governments that are failing to protect their children.

I believe that the lessons learned and successes that I have addressed thus far in addressing the LRA's use of child soldiers can inform U.S. engagement elsewhere, and I want to reiterate the specific recommendations in regards to the counter LRA efforts for you, Congressman, and your colleagues in Congress.

First is to continue to support the efforts of the U.S. advisers and to ensure they have the resources they need to continue these robust, creative, and rapidly deployed defection initiatives. Secondly, I would ask for encouragement of the Department of Defense to continue to find ways for the U.S. advisers to increase their collaboration, their communication and coordination with local communities and with NGOs in the region. I believe doing so will help ensure that these efforts are effective and sustainable, that they are culturally relevant and relevant to the geographic context, and that they will be sensitive to the short and long term impacts on the communities that we are there to serve.

And lastly, appropriators should secure funding in the fiscal year 2015 budget to support reintegration of former child soldiers and others most severely affected by LRA violence, and particularly women and girls, as well as civilian protection and resilience building programs in LRA affected areas.

Before I close, I would like to briefly share the story of one young man whose experience as an LRA child soldier reinforces the needs I have addressed today and provides hope for how Americans, inside and outside the government, can support communities as they pursue peace and safety for their children.

On June 21, 1998, the LRA abducted a 10 year old boy named Opondo Pondo from his family in northern Uganda. For the next 15 years Opondo was forced to kill and abduct other children just like him, and he was brainwashed to believe that escape was impossible, that he would never be accepted back home because he was a killer now. Then, on August 21, 2013, Opondo found a window of opportunity and the personal courage within to finally escape. Holding a defection flyer and a shortwave radio above his head, he walked out of the bush. And with the help of a brave Congolese community member who escorted him to the U.N. security forces, Opondo peacefully surrendered after 15 years as a soldier and hostage of the LRA.

During interviews with Opondo after his defection he explained that for several months he listened to "come home" radio messages on FM radio and shortwave radio, as well as messages that the U.S. advisers broadcast through helicopter mounted speakers. And the defection flyer that he held above his head had actually been in his pocket for

several months as he contemplated escape, tried to muster up courage, and wait for an opportunity to leave.

Now Opondo is back at home with his family in Uganda. I have to say, we captured the reunion he had with his parents on film and it is one of the most powerful things you could ever witness. And even while Opondo is struggling through his own reintegration process, which, very honestly, is incredibly difficult for him, he has volunteered his time, together with Invisible Children, to speak on a regular radio program personally encouraging fellow LRA abductees to find the courage to leave and peacefully surrender.

I am happy to say that just this morning in Gulu, Uganda, the community there held a welcome home ceremony for a group of new women and children that were just released from the LRA, dozens of women and children that were released from the LRA just last month. And Opondo asked to serve as the keynote speaker at their ceremony to welcome them home. He shared his personal story of his long journey home, and he welcomed these women and children into a new life of freedom from LRA captivity. And I just wanted to briefly share one line from his speech that he gave just this morning in Gulu. He said, "I want to thank the U.S. President for having committed their Army to sport counter LRA efforts, and I want to appeal the to U.S. Government that this effort should be strengthened further so that those still trapped in captivity may be rescued."

My sincere thanks to you, Congressman McGovern, for this time, and thank you so much for this conversation.

Mr. McGOVERN. Thank you very much. I appreciate that very much and I appreciate your testimony.

[The statement of Ms. Dougan follows:]

Prepared Statement of Lisa Dougan

I'd like to begin by thanking Representatives McGovern (D-MA) and Wolf (R-VA) for their leadership of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission and for convening this very important discussion about the use of children as soldiers around the globe, and the role of the United States in addressing this abhorrent injustice.

Background

At the outset, I'd like to emphasize that this is a conversation that millions of young Americans would be very encouraged to know is taking place in our nation's capitol.

Since Invisible Children's beginnings ten years ago, we have witnessed the power, creativity, and relentless commitment of young people who were confronted with the crimes of Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army, and the injustices facing young people their own age on the other side of the world.

For the past several years, hundreds of thousands of high school and college students across the country have lobbied the U.S. government, calling for action to help protect children in central Africa from LRA violence. They have held thousands of lobby meetings in their home districts and on Capitol Hill, written

tens of thousands of letter, made countless phone calls, rallied in the streets and slept out on the concrete – all to raise the banner for fellow young people being forced to fight and kill as soldiers.

And with the leadership inside Washington from sympathetic members of Congress like yourselves, these dedicated young activists helped advance unprecedented action from the U.S. government to help protect children and their families from LRA violence, return abducted child soldiers to their families, and bring Joseph Kony to justice.

In May 2010, Congress unanimously passed the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act, which required President Obama to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the LRA conflict. In November of 2010, the President released that strategy, and the following year he announced the deployment of 100 U.S. military advisors to central and East Africa to assist regional efforts to address the LRA.

Just to provide a brief update on the situation now: over the past three years, the efforts of the U.S. advisors have helped contribute to a significant reduction in killings and abductions by the LRA. Still, Joseph Kony remains at large, and the LRA continues to be a significant threat to communities in the region. And despite the overall downward trend in LRA violence since the initial deployment of the U.S. advisors, we have actually seen an increase in LRA attacks in areas of DRC and CAR compared to this time last year.

The need remains for sustained, creative, and collaborative efforts to finally end the LRA crisis and ensure that Kony's child soldiers are safely and successfully reintegrated back into society. We at Invisible Children are trying to play our part, not only through robust advocacy efforts here in the United States, but also through on-the-ground programs and collaborative partnerships with local communities, civil society leaders, and government actors -- including the U.S. military.

My desire today is to contribute lessons learned from Invisible Children's efforts over the past ten years to help stop the abduction and conscription of child soldiers by Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and to support former LRA child soldiers and their communities in the long road of recovery. That said, it's important to note that our experience and observations apply specifically to the context of an illegal armed group, and not the state-sponsored recruitment of children into national armies per se. Still, I hope our work on the LRA issue and lessons learned can add a helpful perspective to this dialogue about increased U.S. engagement on the issue of child soldiers worldwide.

In the hopes that Invisible Children's programs, and the nature of the partnerships behind them, might be a helpful model for other contexts involving child soldiers, I will spend the rest of my time today exploring three main aspects of our work in central and East Africa: (1) encouraging peaceful defections, (2) supporting the reintegration of former child soldiers, and (3) building the capacity of local communities to protect their own children from the threat of abduction and forced recruitment.

Encouraging and Facilitating Peaceful Defections

Given the complexities involved with stopping an armed group comprised almost entirely of combatants who were abducted as children, defection initiatives are both a moral imperative and an effective strategy to peacefully dismantle the LRA from within. To do this, we start by combating the psychological and physical barriers that often keep child soldiers, and their abductors, from leaving the battlefield.

For the past three years, Invisible Children has worked in collaboration with local community leaders and with the U.S. military advisors in the region to create and disseminate defection messages that address the fears, lies, and shame that often keep LRA members from trying to return home. These messages come either in the form of printed fliers that include photographs of LRA defectors safe at home with their families and are distributed aurally over areas of known LRA activity, or they come in the form of recorded audio messages from LRA defectors, personally encouraging their fellow abductees to leave the bush and come home. These audio recordings are then broadcast over FM and shortwave radio stations in the region, or – with the help of the U.S. advisors – through helicopter-mounted speakers.

Over the years, we have found that the most effective themes to emphasize in defection messages are home, family, forgiveness and safety – themes that would resonate with any child afraid that he or she is unworthy of being accepted back home.

As efforts to encourage peaceful defections continue, it is critically important to simultaneously ensure that communities in the region -- which have experienced years of brutal violence at the hands of the LRA -- are properly sensitized, equipped, and willing to safely receive defectors and support their return home. In doing so, we not only help mitigate the risk that a young LRA defector will be met with hostility and violence from the receiving community, we also help ensure that LRA-affected communities are playing a central role in the pursuit of peace for their own region. Over the past year, as Invisible Children has implemented these sensitization and training programs in DRC and CAR, we have seen multiple communities, once hostile toward LRA defectors, now readily and courageously participating in efforts to support their defection.

Critical to the success of these defection efforts has been the increasing willingness of the U.S. advisors to work collaboratively with NGOs and local communities. While it is not always appropriate for U.S. security forces to be involved in countering the problem of child soldiers, we recommend that a similar model of cooperation and coordination with local communities and NGOs be replicated wherever U.S. forces are present.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Once a child soldier takes the courageous step of leaving the battlefield – often putting his or her life at risk to do so – he or she faces the new battle of reintegrating back into civilian life, establishing a livelihood, and learning how to interact with family, friends, and community in a healthy way. Focused reintegration support is urgently needed for children, young adults, and women coming out of the LRA, as well as the families and communities receiving them home, whose understanding of trauma, social acceptance, and resilience are key to successful reintegration.

Holistic, community-based reintegration programs not only benefit former child soldiers and their receiving communities, they contribute to lasting peace and stability in the region, and they strengthen ongoing defection efforts by showing current combatants that the opportunity for a better life awaits them back home. This concept was confirmed by many former LRA child soldiers and adult combatants interviewed by Invisible Children following their defection.

While Invisible Children currently provides reintegration support to LRA returnees in Uganda, and immediate assistance to LRA returnees in CAR and DRC whenever possible, these efforts only address a small fraction of the need in the region.

Unfortunately, in the case of the LRA conflict, while we are seeing sustained, collaborative investments in *defection* efforts – which should continue -- the international community has largely neglected the reintegration needs of those coming out of LRA captivity in recent years. The United States and other donors should increase support for reintegration programs benefitting former LRA combatants and captives in DRC, CAR, South Sudan, and Uganda, ensuring a more comprehensive approach to the problem.

Equipping communities to protect their own children

Creative defection efforts and holistic reintegration programs are both critically important components to addressing the ongoing use of child soldiers by the LRA. However, I trust that the ultimate desire of everyone here today is to identify effective ways to help prevent this horrible phenomenon from happening in the first place. The abduction, recruitment, or coercion of children to fight as soldiers is an abhorrent injustice – but it also always arises in situations where children and their communities are already extremely vulnerable.

In the case of the LRA, Joseph Kony has and continues to focus his predatory violence and child abduction on marginalized communities -- first northern Uganda, then moving to DRC, CAR, and South Sudan.

These are all communities far from their respective centers of government, severely lacking infrastructure and economic opportunities, and thus extremely vulnerable to predatory groups like the LRA. This reality is starkly illustrated in the example of the Makombo massacre in DRC, where there LRA committed a string of consecutive attacks over the course of several days – ultimately killing 321 civilians and abducting 250 others, including at least 80 of children. According to Human Rights Watch, the youngest victim was a 3-year-old girl who had been burned alive. The massacre took place in such a remote area of DRC, lacking any communication mechanisms, allowing the LRA to easily kill and abduct scores of children and families in town after town, and the international community didn't receive word of the tragedy for months.

While it is absolutely necessary to keep states accountable to their duty to administer good governance and protect their own civilians from violence, we have found in the context of the LRA crisis –in places like Makombo -- that it is also critically important to help equip communities to better protect their own children and themselves. After all, these community members are going to be more committed than anyone else to protect their own children from abduction.

One approach Invisible Children has taken to address this need has been the development of an Early Warning HF radio network, in partnership with community leaders in DRC and CAR, which enables communities to alert each other, as well as security forces in the region, of LRA activity. Through a very simple, locally-run system like the HF radio network, communities that have historically been left completely vulnerable to predatory groups like the LRA, now have a way to be central agents in their own protection and the protection of their children. Additionally, the steady stream of timely and reliable information about LRA attacks and abductions, provides an opportunity to increase accountability for national governments failing to protect their own children.

Conclusion and Recommendations

By unpacking a few facets of our experience addressing the issue of LRA child soldiers, I hope this provides some helpful inspiration for what could be done in other contexts to expand the scope of possible U.S. engagement.

Specific to the issue of the Lord's Resistance Army, I want to reiterate the following recommendations for this Commission and your colleagues in Congress:

1. Continue to support the efforts of the U.S. advisors in central Africa, and ensure that they have the resources they need to deploy robust, creative, and rapid defection initiatives.
2. Encourage the Department of Defense to continue to find ways for the U.S. advisors currently working on counter-LRA efforts – particularly defection and civilian protection efforts -- to increasingly work in collaboration with local communities and NGOs in the region.
3. Appropriators should secure funding in the FY15 budget for reintegration support for former child soldiers and others – including women – most severely affected by LRA violence, as well as civilian protection and resilience-building programs in LRA-affected areas of central Africa.

Thank you again to Representatives McGovern and Wolf for the opportunity to share with you all today.

Mr. McGOVERN. Our last witness, but certainly not our least, is my friend Aldo Civico, who I have traveled with, and who I think is one of the best and most thoughtful analysts on so many issues involving conflicts, especially in Latin America but around the world.

So welcome, and the floor is yours.

STATEMENT OF ALDO CIVICO

Mr. CIVICO. Thank you, Representative Jim McGovern, for having me here, for your words. Thank you for the panelists and also to the committee for holding this hearing on child soldiers and for the opportunity to speak with you today on such an important and sensitive topic.

Since 2001, I have been conducting ethnographic research on the armed conflict in Colombia. The encounter in 2003 with one of the major leaders of the paramilitaries brought me to focus my research on the perpetrators of gross human rights violations. Over the years, I met and became familiar with members of paramilitary death squads, the guerillas, criminal groups linked to drug trafficking, and urban gangs.

During my ethnographic research, I had also the opportunity to meet and to interview several minors who were members of armed groups in Colombia. In addition, several of the combatants I met, though already adults at the time of our interview, had been recruited when they were still minors. I would like to share with you some of the insights that I learned by listening to the stories of some of the child soldiers I met over the past decade in Colombia.

Today, Colombia faces the historic opportunity to end its internal armed conflict of 50 years. For the past 2 years, the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the FARC, have been negotiating a peace agreement, and, if successful, Colombia will have the chance to turn the page and to leave behind a history of violence. Children and adolescents have been suffering significantly as a consequence of both the armed conflict and the severe inequality that marks the everyday life of a great number of Colombians. The illegal and forced recruitment has been one form in which children and adolescents have been victimized in Colombia. Today, minors count for approximately half of the combatants that fill the ranks of guerillas and criminal groups linked to drug trafficking. But minors have been also used by the Colombian army as informants, as repeatedly denounced by the United Nations.

The biographies of Colombian child soldiers reflect the geographical, social, economic, and cultural condition of marginality they inhabit. This environment not only constrains the opportunities and choices minors have, but also enables their biographies as child soldiers. And I would like to share with you some snapshot of the stories. Jose grew up in a coca growing area of Colombia. His parents, as most of the residents of his village, were coca leaf collectors. Still a child, he began helping his parents in the coca field. The entire social and economic life of the village where he grew up revolved around those fields. "There was no presence of the state," he told me when I interviewed him. The only school he could go to was hours away in walking distance, and the guerillas were the only authority in the area. Jose did not like to work in the coca fields and becoming a guerilla fighter seemed to him the best strategy available for him for a better living condition.

Several of the combatants I interviewed came from families whose involvement in the conflict stretched over a few generations. The story of Luna is a case in point. One of Luna's uncles was a guerilla leader of the EPL, the Peoples Liberation Army, who eventually switched over to the paramilitaries. Other members of the family were guerilla fighters, while some of his older brothers had joined the Colombian army. For Luna, it all began when he was 12 years old, when his brother in law, a hit man, introduced him to the world of selective killing. "He was doing the killing while I was driving the bike," Luna told me. Soon after, Luna joined a paramilitary death squad. "This is how I started killing lots of people, but it was a good life," Luna told me. "I didn't have a childhood, that is to say not a regular childhood where one goes to school," he confessed once. "I spent my childhood among weapons," he observed.

When the paramilitaries demobilized, along with his companions, Luna disarmed, but after a few months he felt useless and emasculated. He thus joined a drug trafficking criminal group. And a few years ago, Luna was killed by a hit man near the town where he was living with his wife and her son.

Today, a reason of concern is the recruitment of minors by the so called BACRIM, the criminal groups, which after the demobilization of the paramilitaries perpetuated their modes of violence and domination and inherited their drug trafficking business. Starting in 2007, the BACRIM have been penetrating important urban areas. Today, 257 different BACRIM groups operate in 316 municipalities across Colombia and have an estimated 6,000 combatants. Over the past few years, the BACRIM have been a major agent in the illegal recruitment of children and adolescents, especially in urban areas.

The story of Manuel is a paradigmatic one. When Manuel's mother separated from her abusive husband she moved with her two children to the periphery of Medellin. Manuel, the younger son at the time, was only 11 years old. To provide for her family, Manuel's mother spent long hours away from home, so the streets became Manuel's home.

On the street, Manuel befriended with people who belonged to local gangs affiliated to a BACRIM. Manuel began his criminal career as a lookout, then as a drug courier, and in a short time he became a full member of a gang. Manuel was smart and proactive, and soon he was entrusted with more responsibilities, until at age 15 he became the commander of an entire sector in the neighborhood where he was living. Still a teenager, he had become a professional criminal taking orders from his boss and giving orders to his army of gang members, all minors like him.

When Manuel shared his story with me, he told me his commander had become a father figure to him, someone who took care of him and protected him. Carrying a gun, having money that allowed him to address in a fashionable way, made Manuel feel significant, important, and respected.

Two circumstances changed the course of events in Manuel's life. David was his best friend in the gang and someone of his own group shot him. David breathed his last in Manuel's arms at the hospital. The episode opened Manuel's eyes, and he realized that 1 day his best friend's fate might also become his own destiny. Manuel made his mind up and negotiated his exit from the gang.

The second circumstance that helped Manuel's transition was an informal group of graffiti artists that invited him to join their crew and you actually met them in Medellin. Painting murals helped Manuel to transcend his own experience and to consolidate the new life he embraced, and today Manuel is a positive youth leader in his community and a college freshman studying law.

Child soldiers in Colombia are the product of the armed conflict, the illegal economies, and the structural violence, poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, et cetera, into which they were born. It is the intertwinement of these conditions of marginality that qualify the forced character of child soldier's recruitment in Colombia.

The forced and illegal recruitment of minors by armed groups in Colombia therefore does not mean only, as it happens in certain instances, the children and adolescents are abducted, that is snatched from their homes and families against their will; rather, in the great majority of the cases it is the overall conditions of marginality that represent the forced character of children's recruitment. As anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom once observed, often in war the safest place to be is in an armed group.

The great majority of the child soldiers who shared their experience with me were minors in search of respect. In their eyes, joining an illegal armed group like the guerillas, a paramilitary death squad, or a gang was perceived at the best strategy at hand to satisfy their basic human needs for security, a sense of belonging, and significance.

I would like to conclude respectfully submitting to your attention four recommendations. First, as it was mentioned before, attention needs to be paid to the peace process between the government of Colombia and the FARC guerillas in Cuba. The agenda does not mention explicitly child soldiers, but their integration of minors who filled the ranks of the FARC in the past and in the present needs to be addressed. The demobilization and reintegration of paramilitary members that began in 2003 completely neglected the use of child soldiers, and this is a mistake that today cannot be repeated.

Second, I briefly mentioned that according to the United Nations the Colombian army uses minors as informants. I suggest that the United States Congress verifies whether minors are used for intelligence purposes, and if child soldiers, when they demobilize are retained in military basis beyond the 36 hours allowed by Colombian law. Military aid to Colombia should be conditioned by the armed forces complying with the laws protecting children in conflict.

Third, to prevent the recruitment of child soldiers, the support of policies and intervention that give minors access to education in areas of Colombia where armed

groups are recruiting children and adolescents should be a priority for the United States. As Amartya Sen highlighted, development is a pillar of freedom and education is a pillar of development.

An instance of a sound policy and innovative intervention that addresses the root causes of illegal recruitment are, for example, the 80 educational parks that the Department of Antioquia is currently building in at risk areas. These parks, that include libraries and spaces for the performance of the arts, were conceived to be a protective environment for children.

Furthermore, the educational and artistic initiatives created by youth leaders and youth groups in urban areas, such as the graffiti groups that supported Manuel in his life transformation, should also be encouraged and supported with small grants as well as with opportunities for conflict resolution and leadership development. From within the space of that, these courageous and creative young people generate spaces of hope where an alternative future without violence can be imagined.

Finally, because urban areas are becoming increasingly the spaces where children and adolescents are illegally recruited by criminal organizations, Congress should consider expanding the definition of child soldiers contained in the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act to include also minors illegally recruited by gangs to work for drug trafficking and transnational crime organizations.

In fact, extending the notion of child soldiers to minors trapped in urban gangs will provide the international community as well as national governments with the legal framework and the tools to intervene and to protect minors leaving urban areas and illegally recruited by organized crime, implementing the strategies and the tools today available for child soldiers as defined by the Rome Statute. At the same time, it would allow the severity of a war crime to be applied to the leaders of organized crime that illegally recruit children and adolescents.

Thank you for listening to my testimony today, and I look forward to answering any question you might have.

Mr. McGOVERN. Well, thank you very much for your testimony.

[The statement of Mr. Civico follows:]

Prepared Statement of Aldo Civico

I would like to thank the co-chairs of the Tom Lantos Committee on Human Rights, Congressman Jim McGovern and Congressman Frank Wolf, and the members of this committee for holding this hearing on child soldiers and for the opportunity to speak with you today on such an important and sensitive topic.

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I am Aldo Civico and I am an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Rutgers University, in Newark. Since 2001, I have been conducting ethnographic research on the armed conflict in Colombia. The encounter in 2003 with one of the major leaders of the paramilitaries brought me to focus my research on the perpetrators of gross human rights violations.

Over the years, I met and became familiar with members of paramilitary death squads, the guerrillas, criminal groups, linked to drug trafficking, and urban gangs. In addition, my understanding of the Colombian armed conflict has been shaped by the encounters with dozens of victims, human rights leaders, and Colombian scholars—among others.

During my ethnographic research, I had also the opportunity to meet and to interview several minors who were members of armed groups in Colombia. In addition, several of the combatants I met, though they were already adults at the time of our interview, had been recruited when they were still minors.

As a discipline, anthropology prioritizes qualitative over quantitative research methods, and my own fieldwork relies on long term observation as well as in-depth interviews and the recording of life histories. Today, I would like to share with you some of the insights I learned by listening to the stories of some of the child soldiers I met over the past decade in Colombia.

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Today, Colombia faces the historic opportunity to end its internal armed conflict of 50 years. Two years ago, president Juan Manuel Santos announced the beginning of formal peace talks between the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces guerrilla, the FARC. Talks are currently underway in Cuba, while pre-talks have begun also with the guerrilla of the National Liberation Army, the ELN.

If, as it is hoped by a great majority of Colombians, a peace agreement will be signed in the near future, the country will have the opportunity to turn the page and to leave behind a history of violence perpetuated by paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the state in which 218 thousand people lost their lives, 27 thousand people were kidnapped, almost 2,000 massacres were carried out, over 27 thousand individuals were disappeared, and about 5 million people were forcibly displaced.

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Children and adolescents have been suffering significantly as a consequence of both the armed conflict and the severe inequality, which marks the everyday life of a great number of Colombians. Minors make up 37% of the total population. Almost a quarter of them, that is 24%, live below the poverty line; another 13.5% suffers of chronic malnutrition and 18.3% has not access to education.

Because of the internal armed conflict, children have been the victims of all forms of violence, from killings, to disappearances, to forced displacement. According to a report issued by the Bogota based Historical Memory Group, in the past 30 years, 2.5 million children were forcibly displaced; 154 were disappeared; 154 were selectively killed and 342 were victims of land mines.

In addition, children were often forced to witness the torturing and killing of their parents, family members, friends and neighbors. Minors thus had to endure not only the consequences of physical violence,

resulting often in the mutilation of their bodies, but also the trauma caused by unspeakable psychological abuse.

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The lived experience of child soldiers is the product of larger forces at play. The biographies of minors, who join armed groups in Colombia reflect the geographical, social, economic and cultural conditions of marginality they inhabit. This environment not only constraints the opportunities and choices minors have, but at the same time enables their biographies as child soldiers.

Some examples from my own fieldwork in Colombia, will serve to understand some of the circumstances that brought minors to be recruited or to join illegal armed forces.

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In areas marked by scarcity, the presence of an armed group is at times perceived by a minor as an opportunity to ameliorate his or her own living condition and to better his or her status in society.

For a male adolescent, in particular, joining an armed group becomes a strategy to fulfill his understanding of manhood, by carrying a weapon, wearing a uniform, or riding a motorbike.

Edwin joined the FARC guerrilla when he was about 10 years old. He was living in a small village in the department of Antioquia. At the time the village was under the influence of the guerrilla. His family struggled to have ends meet. He was fascinated by the uniforms the guerrilla fighters wore and the weapons they carried. Edwin believed he would be better off by joining the FARC. One morning he left his family and joined the guerrilla.

Jose grew up in a coca growing area of Colombia. His parents, as most of the residents of his village, were coca leaf collectors. Still a child, he began helping his parents in the coca fields. The entire social and economic life of the village where he grew up revolved around those fields. There was no presence of the state, he told me when I interviewed him. The only school he could go to was hours away in walking distance and the guerrilla was the only authority in the area. Jose did not like to work in the coca fields and becoming a guerrilla fighter seemed to him the best strategy available to him for better living conditions.

Jader was abandoned by his teenager mother at birth, and he grew up in a small farm owned by his grandparents. He was 14 years old when his grandfather died and Jader felt alone and abandoned in the world. When a paramilitary group came through the family's estate, Jader talked to the commander and asked him to join his paramilitary unit. His request was granted and Jader was sent to a paramilitary training camp. Eventually, Jader became a field commander, and one of his responsibilities was to escort drug shipments along the Atrato river, which crosses the Afro-Colombian region of Chocó.

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Several of the combatants I interviewed came from families whose involvement in the conflict stretched over a few generations.

The story of Luna is a case in point. In the northern region of Uraba, one of Luna's uncles was a guerrilla leader of the EPL, the People Liberation Army, who eventually switched over to the paramilitaries. Other members of the family were guerrilla fighters, while some of his older brothers had

joined the Colombian army. Because of the variety of armed groups to which several members of his family belonged, Luna liked to say his family was like a fruit salad. Eventually, Luna joined the ranks of the paramilitaries, and in his early twenties became a field commander.

For Luna, it all begun when he was 12 years old. At the time, he was living with his married sister. It was his brother in law that introduced him to the world of selective killing. His brother in law, in fact, was a hit man. "He was doing the killing while I was driving the bike," Luna told me. Soon after, Luna joined a paramilitary death squad, which carried out social cleansing in the region. "This is how I started killing lots of people, but it was a good life," Luna told me.

The adrenaline and the power that Luna felt carrying a gun, nourished in him an obsessive fascination for weapons. Killing, he told me, became like practicing a sport. "I didn't have a childhood; that is to say not a regular childhood where one goes to school" he confessed once. "I spent my childhood among weapons," he observed.

When the paramilitaries demobilized, along with his companions, Luna disarmed, but after a few months, he felt useless and emasculated. He thus joined a drug trafficking criminal group. A few years ago, Luna was killed by a hit man near the town where he was living with his wife and her son.

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In some cases, it is the witnessing of violence and the desire for revenge that brought minors to join an illegal armed group.

This is the case of Oscar, a member of the paramilitaries I met in Medellin during the demobilization process. At the time of our meeting he was in his mid twenties, but Oscar had joined a paramilitary death squad when he was only 14 years old, after he witnessed the killing of his mother on behalf of the guerrilla.

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The story of Manuel is a paradigmatic one.

When Manuel's mother separated from her abusive husband, she moved with her two children in a peripheral area of Medellin. Manuel, the younger son, at the time was only 11 years old. To provide for her family, Manuel's mother spent long hours away from home; thus the streets became Manuel's home.

In the street, Manuel befriended with people who belonged to local gangs affiliated to a Bacrim. Manuel begun his criminal carrier as a lookout, then as a drug courier and in a short time he became a full member of a gang. Manuel was smart and proactive, and soon he was entrusted with more responsibilities until, at age 15, he became the commander of an entire sector in the neighborhood where he was living. Still a teenager, he had become a professional criminal, taking orders from his boss and giving orders to his army of gang members, all minors like him.

When Manuel shared his story with me, he told me his commander had become a father figure to him; someone who took care of him and protected him, while the bond he had created with the other gang members turned them in brothers. Carrying a gun, having money that allowed him to dress in a fashionable way, made Manuel feel significant, important and respected.

Two circumstances changed the course of events in Manuel's life. David was his best friend in the gang and someone of his own group shot him. David breathed his last in Manuel's arms at the hospital. The episode opened Manuel's eyes, and he realized that one day his best friend's fate might become also his own destiny. Manuel made his mind up and negotiated his exit from the gang. "You are smart and you deserve a different kind of life - the boss told him — but if I meet you I am going to kill you."

The second circumstance that helped Manuel's transition was an informal group of graffiti artists that invited him to join their crew. Painting murals helped Manuel to transcend his own experience and to consolidate the new life he embraced. Today Manuel is a positive youth leader in his community and a college freshman, studying law.

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The life of Colombian child soldiers, that is their imaginary and lived experience, mirrors the culture of violence and the condition of marginality in which their biography takes shape and unfolds. Child soldiers in Colombia are the product of the armed conflict, the illegal economies and the structural violence (which include poverty, malnutrition, lack of education, of health care, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, etc.) in which they were born into. It is the intertwinement of these conditions of marginality that qualify the forced character of child soldiers' recruitment in Colombia.

The forced and illegal recruitment of minors by armed groups in Colombia, therefore does not mean only, as it happens in certain instances, that children and adolescents are abducted, that is snatched from their homes and families against their will. Rather, in the great majority of the cases it is the overall conditions of marginality that represent the forced character of children's recruitment. As anthropologist Carolyn Nordstrom once observed, often in war the safest place to be is an armed group.

The great majority of the child soldiers who shared their experience with me, were minors in search of respect; in their eyes, joining an illegal armed group like the guerrilla, a paramilitary death squad, or a gang linked to a drug trafficking criminal group, was perceived as the best strategy at hand to satisfy their basic human needs for security, sense of belonging, and significance. In other words, joining an armed group was understood as the most effective strategy to interrupt a pattern of misery and marginalization from which they wanted to break away.

In line with the research of other anthropologists in other conflict zones around the world, my research confirmed that child soldiers, rather than being simply vulnerable individuals subject to manipulation by adults belonging to armed groups, are rational human actors, who have an understanding of the difficult and marginalizing conditions in which they live.

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I would like to conclude, respectfully submitting to your attention some recommendations.

1) Attention needs to be paid to the peace process between the government of Colombia and the FARC guerrilla in Cuba. Currently, parties are negotiating the reparations of victims. The agenda does not mention child soldiers explicitly, but the reintegration of minors who filled the ranks of the Farc in the past and in the present needs to be addressed.

The demobilization and reintegration of paramilitary members that begun in 2003, completely neglected the issue of forced recruitment of minors. This is a mistake that cannot be repeated.

2) I briefly mentioned that according to the United Nations, the Colombian army uses minors as informants, despite the fact that military directives prohibit any use of children for intelligence objectives. This observation has been indirectly acknowledged also by the State Department, which in its latest Country Report on Human Rights, mentions that in Colombia “illegal armed groups killed or threatened children with death on suspicion of being informants for the military.”

I suggest that the United States Congress verifies if minors are used for intelligence purposes and if child soldiers, when they demobilize, are retained in military bases beyond the 36 hours allowed by the Colombian law and interrogated before being handed over to the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare. Military aid to Colombia should be conditioned by the armed forces complying with the laws protecting children in conflict.

3) To prevent the recruitment of child soldiers, the support of policies and interventions that give to minors access to education in areas of Colombia where armed groups are recruiting children and adolescents, should be a priority for the United States, especially at a time when the beginning of a post-conflict phase is becoming increasingly a possibility. As Amartya Sen highlighted already a few years ago, development is a pillar of freedom, and education is a pillar of development.

An instance of a sound policy and innovative intervention that address the root causes of illegal recruitment are, for example, the 80 educational parks the Department of Antioquia, under the leadership of Governor Sergio Fajardo, is currently building in at-risk areas. These parks, that include libraries and spaces for the performance of arts, were conceived to be a protective environment for children. Access to education reduces the risk for children and adolescents to join an armed group.

Furthermore, the educational and artistic initiatives created by youth leaders and youth groups in urban areas, such as the graffiti group that supported Manuel in his life transformation, should also be encouraged and supported with small grants as well as with opportunities for conflict resolution and leadership development. From within spaces of death, these courageous and creative young people give life to space of hope, where an alternative future with no violence can be imagined.

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4) Because urban areas are becoming increasingly the space where children and adolescents are illegally recruited by armed criminal organizations, the United States Congress should consider expanding the definition of child soldiers contained in the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act to include also minors illegally recruited by gangs to work for drug trafficking and transnational crime organizations.

In fact, extending the notion of child soldiers to minors trapped in urban gangs, will provide the international community as well as national governments with the legal framework and the tools to intervene and to protect minors living in urban areas and illegally recruited by organized crime, implementing the strategies and the tools today available for child soldiers as defined by the Rome Statue. At the same time, it would allow to apply the severity of a war crime to the leaders of organized crime that illegally recruit children and adolescents.

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In conclusion, as I have tried to demonstrate, the continued illegal recruitment of child soldiers in Colombia highlights a complex problem that is multi-causal in nature. While the guerrillas and organized

crime do illegally recruit minors, becoming a child soldier is a strategy that children and adolescents employ to satisfy basic human needs.

The success of the peace talks and an end to Colombia's internal armed conflict, will be a major contribution to reduce the forced recruitment of minors. Nonetheless, efforts should be focused also on transforming the root causes of violence in Colombia, such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, and lack of education—all factors that created the forced conditions the encourage the recruitment of minors for war.

In fact, failing to have a systemic understanding and approach to the overall factors and dynamics underpinning the child soldier reality will only perpetuate the pattern of forced recruitment of minors by criminal groups in Colombia.

Contact Information:

Aldo Civico
civico@rutgers.edu

Mr. McGOVERN. And thank you all for your testimonies and your suggestions. And again, I mean, I am going to begin by making you the same offer, that is that we continue to work closely together to try to figure out specific things that we can do.

And, Mr. Eaves, I have got South Sudan underlined 20 times here. I do think that that is something that we should be able to come together on and actually raise the issue. And it is important because laws ought to mean something. And I understand sometimes people don't want to make waves, but you when it comes to human rights violations, and this is a human rights violation, we ought to be serious about it.

Let me just ask you if you could describe for me the effectiveness of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's No Safe Haven initiative, which was designed to prevent international war criminals, including those who were implicated in the recruitment and use of child soldiers, from fleeing prosecution overseas by residing in the United States.

And I guess, from what I understand, to date one individual has been deported due to allegations of his involvement in the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Maybe you can explain to me why the authority to deport or deny U.S. entry on the basis of child soldiers has not been used more often and whether we have some cases where we believe it should be utilized.

Mr. EAVES. Yeah. That is a great question. And the issue of accountability is one that comes up again and again. And when it comes to the implementation of the Child Soldier Accountability Act different from the Child Soldier Prevention Act they were both passed around the same time we have spent so much effort on the implementation of the Prevention Act that there has not been a lot of effort on implementation from the administration on the Accountability Act.

And there have been, I am not sure the exact number, but there have been very, very, very few arrests. I think right after the law was passed we saw one or two arrests, one deportation. Since then it has really fallen off the radar. And so I think that is another to add to the list of recommendations that Congress can ask the administration, is what is the current status of the implementation of that law. Because it is certainly not talked about outside of maybe a very, very, very small circle within Homeland Security.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yeah, because that, again, strikes me as something that shouldn't be controversial and it is something that, again, sends another powerful signal to people who are involved in this around the world who may someday want to come to this country, that you will not find safe haven and peace of mind in this country.

Ms. Dougan, I should say, I can't repeat this enough because people come up to me and say, oh, thank you for holding this hearing and thank you for doing this and thank you for doing this on child soldiers, but this issue just didn't come to me naturally. I was lobbied by people in my own congressional district.

And I think I may have told you this story before, that on the issue of the LRA and Joseph Kony and the child soldiers, I spoke at a high school in Auburn, Massachusetts, which is outside of Worcester, and I was grilled by an entire, I think, senior class about why I wasn't doing more to bring Joseph Kony to justice, why I wasn't doing more to help these child soldiers, why I wasn't doing more to support reintegration efforts. And I was kind of like, where the hell did these kids come from? And then the teacher, I think his name was Zach Barrows, who I guess now works is he still with Invisible Children?

Ms. DOUGAN. He has actually returned back to teach with high school students but spent, invested years in Invisible Children.

Mr. McGOVERN. Is he back in Massachusetts?

Ms. DOUGAN. Uh huh.

Mr. McGOVERN. Is he back in Auburn?

Ms. DOUGAN. So I am sure he would love to see you when you are in district.

Mr. McGOVERN. I will be getting an invitation.

But I point out that because on all these issues, this is why I said before about this, the Children, not Soldiers campaign, why I think these campaigns are really important for Members of Congress is because I think it informs us and sometimes it shames us to do something. I mean, as a result of that meeting we introduced legislation, we have had briefings, on and on and on. But it is those young people who really could identify with this particular human rights issue probably better than I can as an older person, but because they understood that there were children, kids younger than them, kids who were in junior high school and even younger, who are walking around with guns, who are shooting people or getting shot at, whose lives are in jeopardy every single day. And I think people realize how awful that must be.

And so, again, I think to the extent that all of you can work with this commission to try to help us kind of amplify some of these messages and some of these campaigns and some of these initiatives, whether it is to lobby the administration to not grant a waiver to South Sudan or whether it is investing more in reintegration, which I think if you were to put a price tag on the amount of money that needs to be invested in the reintegration programs all over the world, it is quite significant. But it is absolutely essential if people are going to move on.

And you talked about the need to invest in resilience in some of these communities in Central Africa due to their capacity to protect their own children from conscription as child soldiers. I mean, I worry about the risk of voluntary participation in these armed groups, especially in regions like that, because, again, if there is no hope, if

there is no future, if there is nothing, then, I mean, that is why people join gangs, to try to get out of their situation and even though it may be getting into a worse situation. So any suggestions on kind of ways for us to better invest in resiliency in some of these regions we would certainly welcome those comments.

Ms. DOUGAN. Absolutely. Thank you so much, Congressman. And I just appreciate the stories you have shared. I had multiple stories of activists that I wanted to talk about, including a 12 year old girl who had her first lobby meeting with her Senator and she said, I want to do this because there are other 12 year olds on the other side of the world.

Mr. McGOVERN. Right. And when I speak to kids in sixth grade and in junior high, I tell these stories, because young people have a voice and they actually can make a bigger impression on Members of Congress sometimes than adults do. And so they have power, and I want more people to use that power, especially on this issue.

I have met some of the child soldiers that have returned from various parts of the world and it is heartbreaking. And I meet with returning veterans from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq all the time, and the difficulty that adults have in trying to deal with the violence that they have seen and all the horrors that they have seen, it is overwhelming sometimes, and that is an adult. You think of a young child who sees beheadings or who sees executions, it is really hard to imagine how they move on with their life and have a productive life. It is possible, but it takes a lot of attention and a lot of investment.

Ms. DOUGAN. Absolutely. Well, a couple quick points, and hopefully it can be very practically helpful in regards to what you are saying. One, I think, I just hear the stories from Colombia about a young man who, he made the courageous decision to leave but then he had something to move into to express himself constructively and a community of people around him. So I can't emphasize enough that for the work we are doing in LRA affected areas to have increased support from the international community for reintegration programs.

And I do bring up the need for, practically speaking, if USAID can be more encouraged in the funding that they do provide to these areas to really shift focus towards investing in community based efforts. Two reasons. One, those programs are going to be more effective because they are run by people that have an intimate knowledge and understanding of the context that these children are in and also their communities, and how do you support a child and the surrounding community so that you don't encourage further marginalization if that child is receiving additional support when the rest of their community is also suffering.

But practically speaking, a small amount of money can go a long way when you are working with local civil society and communities on the ground that are already doing very effective work but on an incredibly small scale. So very practically, I think when it comes to kind of the resilience of an area like those affected by the LRA and thinking in a

post LRA environment, if there can be an investment in local initiatives to support the healing and recovery of those coming out of the LRA and the communities that are receiving them back.

And then, secondly, you were mentioning the risk of voluntary participation in these armed groups. The LRA affected communities also have a myriad of other armed groups in those same areas. And kind of ironically, in Central African Republic, which I know was brought up, southeastern CAR, that has been affected by the LRA, was actually kind of protected from the outbreak of violence in the rest of the country because of security forces that were there. But in a post LRA environment, those security forces leave, that area is going to be very vulnerable to the violence that has ravaged the rest of the country.

And it is very possible that young people who are disenfranchised, who are needing a livelihood, wanting respect, wanting a sense of power and ownership over their lives, to join armed groups. And so investing in infrastructure and economic opportunities is incredibly important. Having economic opportunity is a significant deterrent to joining an armed group.

Very specifically for Central African Republic, as simple as one stretch of road. There is a stretch of road that connects a community in CAR to a town in South Sudan, I believe it is about 65 miles, and that road is in such disrepair that it completely cuts off this entire region from markets and from economic opportunity. And if the donor community could even invest in this one road it could open up markets and provide these communities with kind of access to economy and opportunities for young people so that they don't have to resort to violence or joining an armed group.

Mr. McGOVERN. Good news is that USAID has kind of launched this resiliency program, which is all about all that everybody has been talking about. But you mentioned this road, sometimes it is that simple. And in Colombia, I mean, over the years I remember trying to figure out why we visited this one community that was kind of way out in Nowheresville, we had to fly to the village to get to it. It was a place called Putumayo. This was many, many years ago. And we were being told by members of the U.S. Embassy that people there were engaged in illegal activities, the drug trade, growing coca, all that kind of stuff.

And we had a little town meeting with some of the villagers and kind of asked, well, why aren't you doing something else? And they basically said, well, there is no road. I mean, what are we going to grow here that we can sell? How do we survive? Yeah, if we had a road we would grow something else or we would do something else. But we are isolated here and there is no help from the state or anybody to help kind of integrate us into the rest of the country so that people can make a living here. So resiliency is really, really important.

You know, Aldo, in your testimony you talked about the reality in which young people growing up is in and of itself is a driver of feeling forced to join an armed actor.

And I mentioned in the beginning of this hearing, I went down to the border, Texas Mexico border to kind of look at what was going on with these young children that were showing up to our border. And it is clear that there are a lot of young people, especially in El Salvador and Honduras, who understand that if they refuse to join, either as a member of a gang or for girls as sexual slave, that they will be killed and quite likely their entire family will be killed. So they don't even have the right for refusal. They are asked to be part of this because if not they will be killed, and it is join the gangs or die. And so I would like your recommendation about adding kind of gangs to this definition and other kind of criminal groups, because I do think, I mean, they are every bit as awful and dangerous as some of these so called armed groups. These guys are armed too. In Medellin and Bogota, although I think we can say that the same dynamic is even worse now in places like Buenaventura in Colombia, there is a lot of interurban displacement as families flee from one neighborhood or another in hopes of keeping their sons or daughters out of violence, people moving all around the place.

And I guess do you have any firsthand experience with young people being forced to flee or be displaced in order to avoid having to join a gang or be targeted by gang violence or by another armed actor?

Mr. CIVICO. Yeah. This is really, really a very important point. Just a few days ago I got a phone call from a woman who her entire family displaced from a rural area came to Medellin. Her minor son is now turning 13 years old, and as soon as he became an adolescent the local gang started wanting to recruit him.

And in order to avoid it the mother called me and asked my help to find an institute in the city where his kid could be welcomed so that he gets out of the neighborhood. And her older son had to leave the neighborhood as well because some of the friends he had were killed because they refused, like he did, in participating in a gang. So that is everyday, really, life of adolescence in cities like Medellin or Buenaventura and Bogota.

And something that maybe I can point out is that, unfortunately, many times it is the case that the police are not an ally of the citizen in helping, but is actually an ally of the gangs. And I think that U.S. Congress and U.S. Government over the years has focused a lot on human rights in the military in Colombia. Maybe the time has come to focus also on the relationship between violation of human rights and the National Police of Colombia on which was less attention. But with the demographic changes where 80 percent, almost 74 percent of the population lives in urban areas, we should start focusing also on the work and the presence of the police in those marginal areas.

Mr. McGOVERN. We were talking to Ms. Zerrougui earlier about the negotiations going on in Colombia and efforts to try to bring this whole issue of child soldiers, of the exploitation of minors more into the forefront and trying to find ways. You hinted at that in your testimony as well.

Mr. CIVICO. Yeah.

Mr. McGOVERN. How does one do that? What specifically should we be doing?

Mr. CIVICO. You know, one specific, concrete thing that could be suggested is that sometimes, either because they are abducted or because they joined the guerillas, but once they do, they disappear. Families for years and years don't know anything about them. I met a girl who was in the FARC and demobilized, and for 8 years the family didn't know about her whereabouts. And it is a lot of cases like that. I just met the sister of another boy who joined the FARC a few years ago and the family doesn't know anything about if this, if he died, if he is still alive, where he is fighting.

So I think that one concrete thing would be to create a list based on the families that come forward and say, I think that my son or I think that my daughter joined the FARC or was abducted by the FARC, creating a list and start verifying with the negotiating team of the FARC where these children are. I think that would be a first step for reparation and also to have an idea how many children, where are we going to reintegrate them. By giving an answer to these families who are in anguish for years about where their children ended up, I think, will be a very concrete step, which I don't think it should be difficult to go through.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yeah, the challenge in the negotiations is who is the one who makes the suggestion that will actually be paid attention to.

Mr. CIVICO. Yeah, especially, I would say with the Colombian Government.

Mr. McGOVERN. Yeah.

Mr. CIVICO. It is a challenge. But that, I think, it is a concrete step that could be done.

Mr. McGOVERN. So let me just close by asking any of you to say anything that you wanted to say that you didn't say that I should know or that you think is important for us to know before we close this hearing. Again, I want to work with you on some of the suggestions that you have already made here, and we will follow up with you individually on those things, but are there any other things that you think we ought to have for the record here before we close?

Mr. Eaves.

Mr. EAVES. I would just say two quick things. One, again, to highlight the vital importance of reintegration and rehabilitation programs. There is a program that we run in DRC that works with former Mai Mai combatants.

Mr. McGOVERN. And how is that funded? How is that program funded?

Mr. EAVES. It is privately funded. So rarely do these programs actually receive any government funding from anywhere. This is actually run primarily from our Germany office. That is where the majority of the funding comes from. As the children, they are mostly 14 to 18 years old, they have served a variety of roles from actual combatants to porters, 100 percent of the girls are survivors of sexual violence. And one of the things that they go through in addition to getting education and help and psychological help is they learn some sort of trade. So it can be like sewing, hair dressing, carpentry. Some will go on to much more technical trades.

One of the most important things, though, is engaging the communities that they are returning to, and this is something that we have learned throughout countries where we have done this kind of programming, to make sure that these children have a safe place to go back to. Because they may be rehabilitated, but they would go back to their families or their communities who rebuke them and say, no, you attacked us for years.

Mr. McGOVERN. Or in the cases where and maybe this is for all of you I mean, in cases where let's say you have a child soldier who decides to voluntarily turn themselves in, but the conflict is still going on, and so even if they are welcomed by their community, they still may not be safe. Are the United States or other countries stepping up to the plate in terms of providing safe haven for some of these people.

And I know it is difficult because, again, sometimes some of the things that they have been involved with make it more complicated to be able to kind of be treated as a refugee, although, I mean, I am just kind of wondering, what happens in that case when you turn yourself in and you go back to your community and the conflict is still going on.

Mr. EAVES. Yeah, one of the most important things, especially when you are looking at children that are demobilized from rebel groups, is they need to receive a demobilization certificate that proves that they have gone through the process. If they don't have that certificate, one thing we have found particularly in DRC, is they will be harassed by government officials, by the army. So we work very hard to make sure they get through our program so they can get that decertification certificate so that they can actually be in what is essentially an active war zone and not be still considered a rebel or a spy or anything like that.

And, again, it sometimes takes outside pressure to make that work. And we had to work very hard with the U.S. Government to try to get them to exert that kind of pressure, particularly when it came to addressing the issue of child soldiers. I think, with the administration, it tended to be early on one step forward, two steps back. They have improved, but there is still a long way to go in addressing all of these issues.

Ms. DOUGAN. I just wanted to add something that I had meant to share earlier. But just to add a positive note, as well, I think the kind of normal assumption to make is that someone coming out of an armed group or a child soldier is kind of across the board going to be a risk. And there actually has been some really fascinating research. Chris

Blattman is one economist and researcher that did specifically research child soldiers coming out of the LRA.

And if there is proper support given, if there is economic opportunity and vocational training, livelihood skills, psychosocial support where there is kind of severe trauma, research shows that children coming out of recruitment as soldiers actually end up being very positive contributors to society. They have higher voter turnout rates and can be leaders. So I just wanted to throw that into the conversation.

Mr. McGOVERN. I think that is an incredibly important point. And this is slightly off the subject, but as related to these children coming in from Central America, one of the things that worried me, though, especially some of these young children, is that it is tough to get adults to open up about what they have experienced. And so if we are going to determine whether or not a child is legitimately a refugee and has fled violence, you just can't expect the kid to say, oh, let me tell you my whole life story. It is very difficult. Sometimes these young kids are ashamed of what they have been through.

That is why this reintegration program and this support structure needs to be really solid, especially when it comes to kids. People who come out of being child soldiers, their life isn't hopeless. Their life can be very, very positive with the proper support. And they are not risk. But we need to be there, and we need to make sure the support structures exist. I think that is a very good point.

Ms. DOUGAN. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. CIVICO. Yeah, briefly, just probably to emphasize something that somehow I already highlighted, but the post conflict, we hope there will be soon post conflict in Colombia, will necessarily and rightly have lots of focus on the rural areas because just historically they have been left behind. But that should not make us forget the urban areas, which I think are going to be major security problems. In the present it is already and it is going to be increasingly also in the future. So we should also emphasize and pay attention to urban areas and to the recruitment of minors.

Mr. McGOVERN. I have mentioned this before, no two countries are alike, but there are lessons we can learn from the past. In El Salvador, I remember during the war I naively believed that if you got a peace agreement that everything would begin to work out. A peace agreement in and of itself was not enough. I mean, there were issues of impunity, issues of reintegration, issues of job security, I could go right down the list, and they were ignored, by and large. And as a result you see this proliferation of illegal actors and gangs and more people being killed in violence each day today than were during the height of the war.

Getting the agreement is like just the beginning of something, not the end. And that is why I think that it is important, whether it is Colombia or wherever we are talking about, if we are trying to resolve conflicts, that this issue of children be front and center and that we pay special attention to making sure the support structures are in place to help

these kids reintegrate back into their communities once the conflict is over or, if need be, get them out of their communities into a safe place so they won't become targets. Because, again, that is the other concern, I worry about these kids that are at the border who might be sent back. If you left your country because you didn't want to join a gang and all of a sudden you get sent back and you show back up at your home that gang is still there.

Mr. CIVICO. Yeah.

Mr. McGOVERN. And the difference is that they know you tried to escape and you may become even a bigger target.

So this is very helpful. I am really happy I stayed here today and didn't go back to Massachusetts, because this is very, very important. And you have given me a lot of good ideas, and I look forward to working with you in the weeks or months ahead. And thank you so much.

[Whereupon, at 3:57 p.m., the commission was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Hearing

Ending the Use of Child Soldiers: History, Impact and Evolution

**Friday, September 19, 2014
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
2360 Rayburn HOB**

Please join the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission for a hearing focused on the use of child soldiers around the world, the evolution of the concept, and explore ways in which the United States could combat the practice.

Hundreds of thousands of children are used as soldiers in armed conflicts around the world. Some join voluntarily, following their family members or as a last resort after their family's murder. Some are abducted and forced to join. Some are armed and actively participate in killing, while others are used as cooks, porters or sexual slaves. Regardless of the means of recruitment or the duties performed, being a child soldier has a lasting and irreversible impact on the lives of these individuals.

In 2008, President Bush signed the Child Soldiers Prevention Act into law. The law was designed to prevent United States' support of regimes that are known to use children in their armed forces. However, as a result of the inclusion of a waiver clause, the United States is still actively supporting regimes that recruit child soldiers.

Please come and learn about the history of child soldiers, its impact on the children's psyches, the evolution of the practice, and why the United States must do more to fight against it.

Panelists

- Leila Zerrougui, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, United Nations
- Jesse Eaves, Senior Policy Advisor for Child Protection, World Vision
- Lisa Dougan, Director of International Programs, Invisible Children
- Aldo Civico, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Rutgers University

For any questions, please contact the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission at 202-225-3599 or tlhrc@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,

James P. McGovern
Co-Chair, TLHRC

Frank R. Wolf
Co-Chair, TLHRC