

**TLHRC Briefing -- Combatting Child Soldiering:
A Pernicious Form of Child Trafficking**

Introductory Remarks of the Honorable Randy Hultgren (IL-14) | February 15, 2017

- Good afternoon. I want to thank you all for being here today.
- I would like to note that this is my first briefing as co-chairman of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission.
- It's an honor for me to serve on this distinguished panel, let alone as its co-chairman, and it certainly is a privilege to do so alongside my friend, colleague, and fellow co-chairman Jim McGovern.
- I look forward to a productive session for the Commission. It is my hope and commitment that the Commission will continue to have a meaningful impact on the many human rights issues which confront us, but just as significantly be an instrument to proffer solutions as well.
- My vision is for the Commission to make a difference and be an instigator for positive change in the circumstances of so many around the world whose fundamental human rights are threatened and violated. In doing so, the Commission honors the legacy of its founding namesake co-chairman, Tom Lantos.
- I believe today's topic to be a particularly relevant issue for the Commission's initial briefing to start the year.
- Whether it's child sex trafficking, abuse of child labor laws, or, as we highlight today marking the International Day against the use of Child Soldiers, crimes perpetrated against children represent a particularly heinous violation of human rights.
- As noted, tens of thousands of children participate in armed forces and armed groups around the world today, including in such extremist groups as Boko Haram and ISIS.
- Children have been forced to take part in at least 21 conflicts worldwide since 2001.
- In fact, it was in 2001 when resettlement efforts were underway in the area near where I'm from – Chicago – for the “Lost Boys” of Sudan.

- Many remember the terrible civil conflict there that tore apart that nation and its families as well.
- Boys as young as age 7 were uprooted from their homes and forced to join as combatants amidst the civil strife, while young girls were sold into slavery.
- Their story to survive is one of unimaginable danger, courage, and endurance.
- As we explore today the full impact of child soldiering and what we can do to address it, I hope to learn more about its nexus with other forms of child exploitation as well.
- As there is a definitive connection between child soldiering and the use of children as laborers and sex slaves, I am interested to hear what our panelists have to say on that matter.
- I want to thank each of our panelists for being here and for the insights they will share with us today.
- I look forward to determining how the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission can play a significant role in helping the United States broaden and improve its efforts to end the forcible recruitment of children as soldiers.

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